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UNCON 2011
FOR FULL DETAILS SEE PAGE 5

Fortean Times 279

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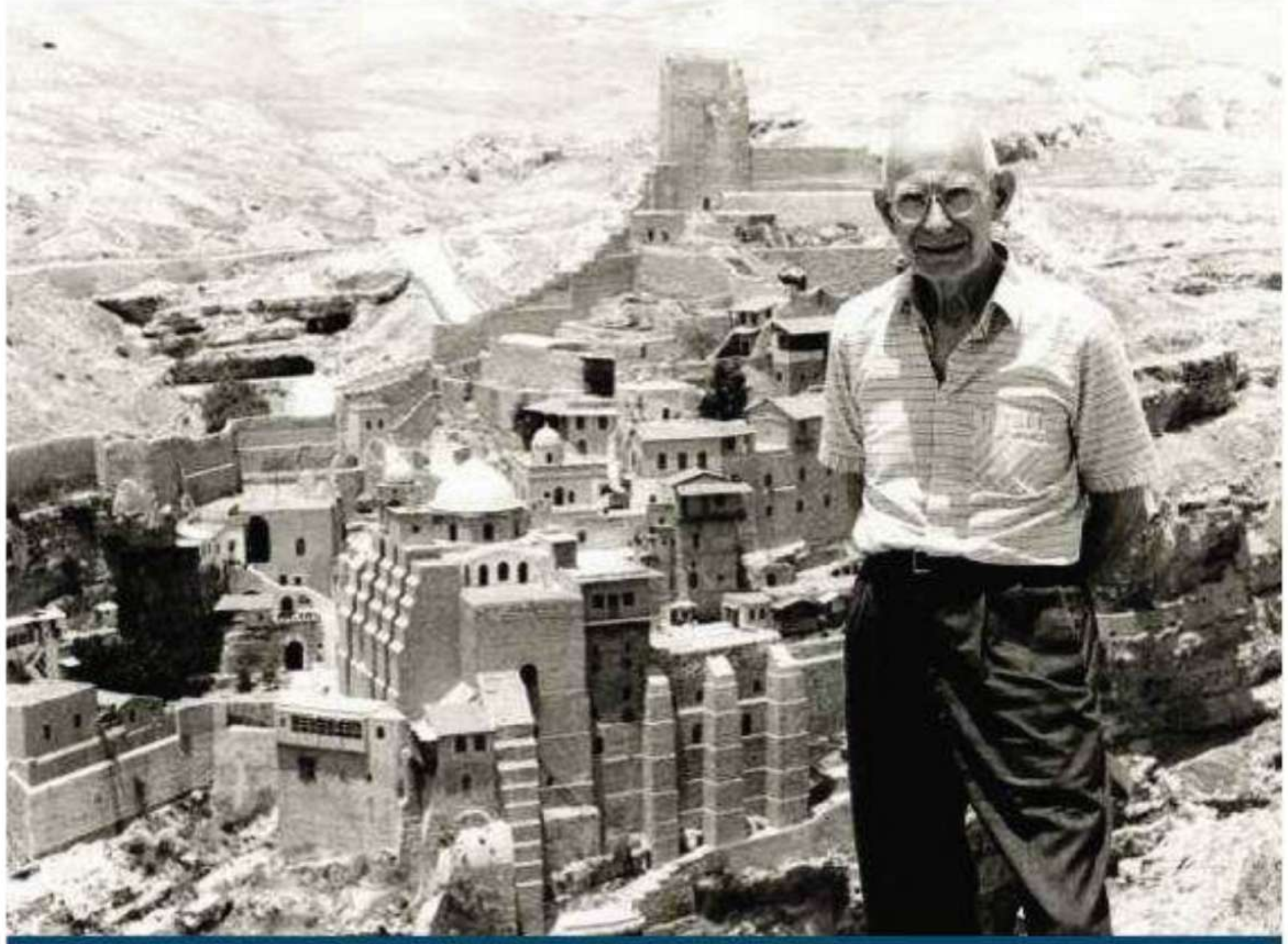

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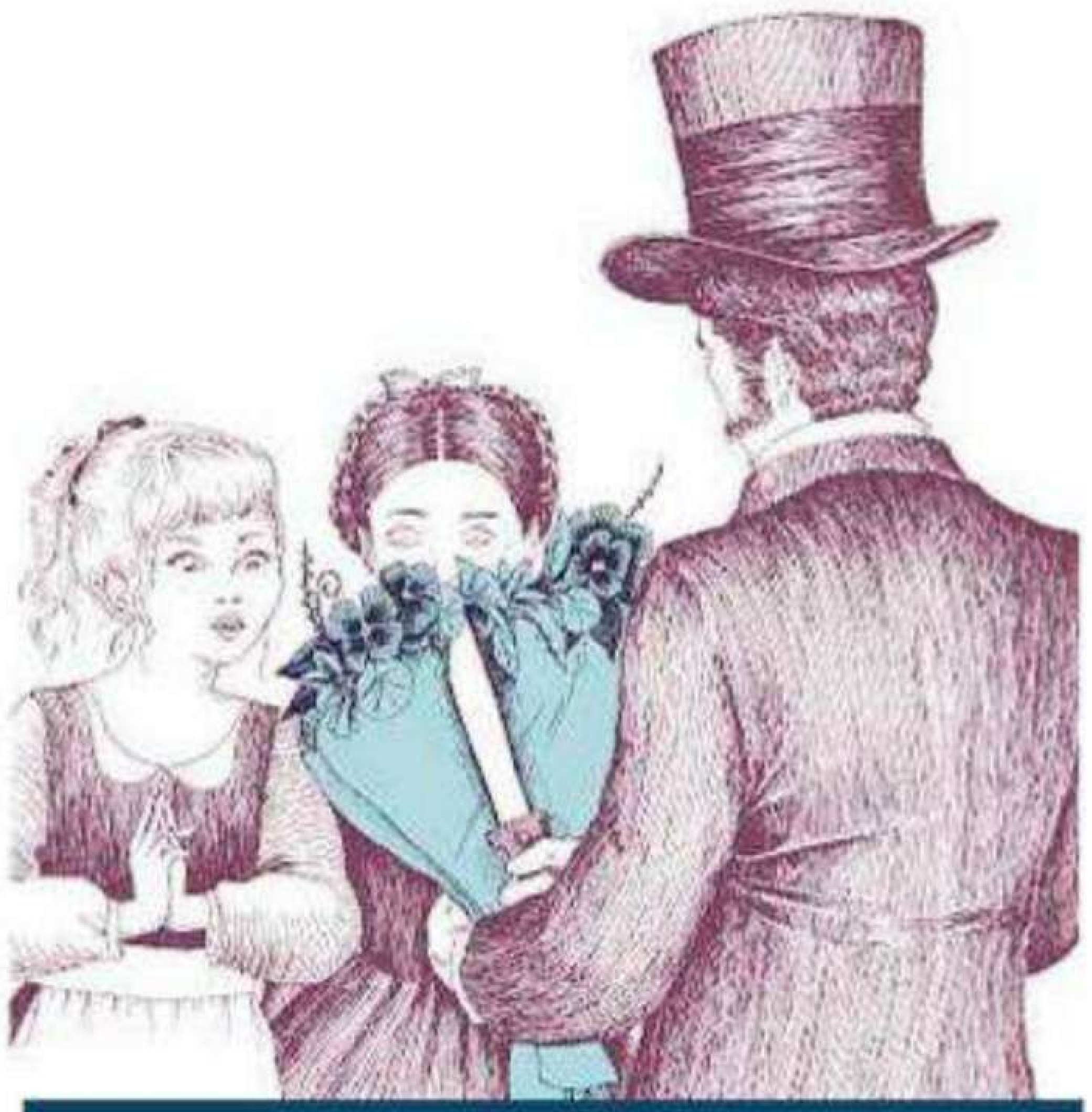

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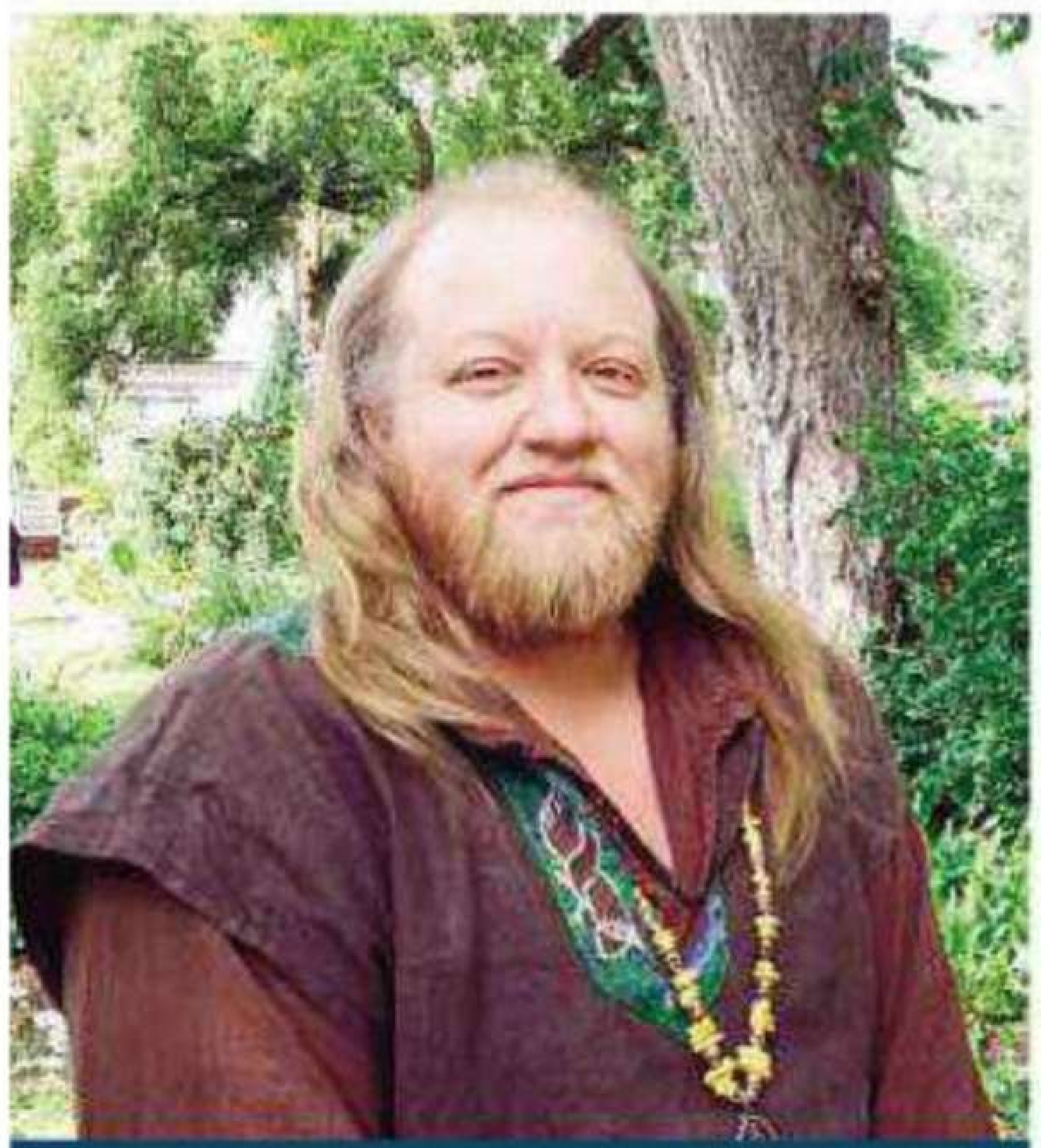

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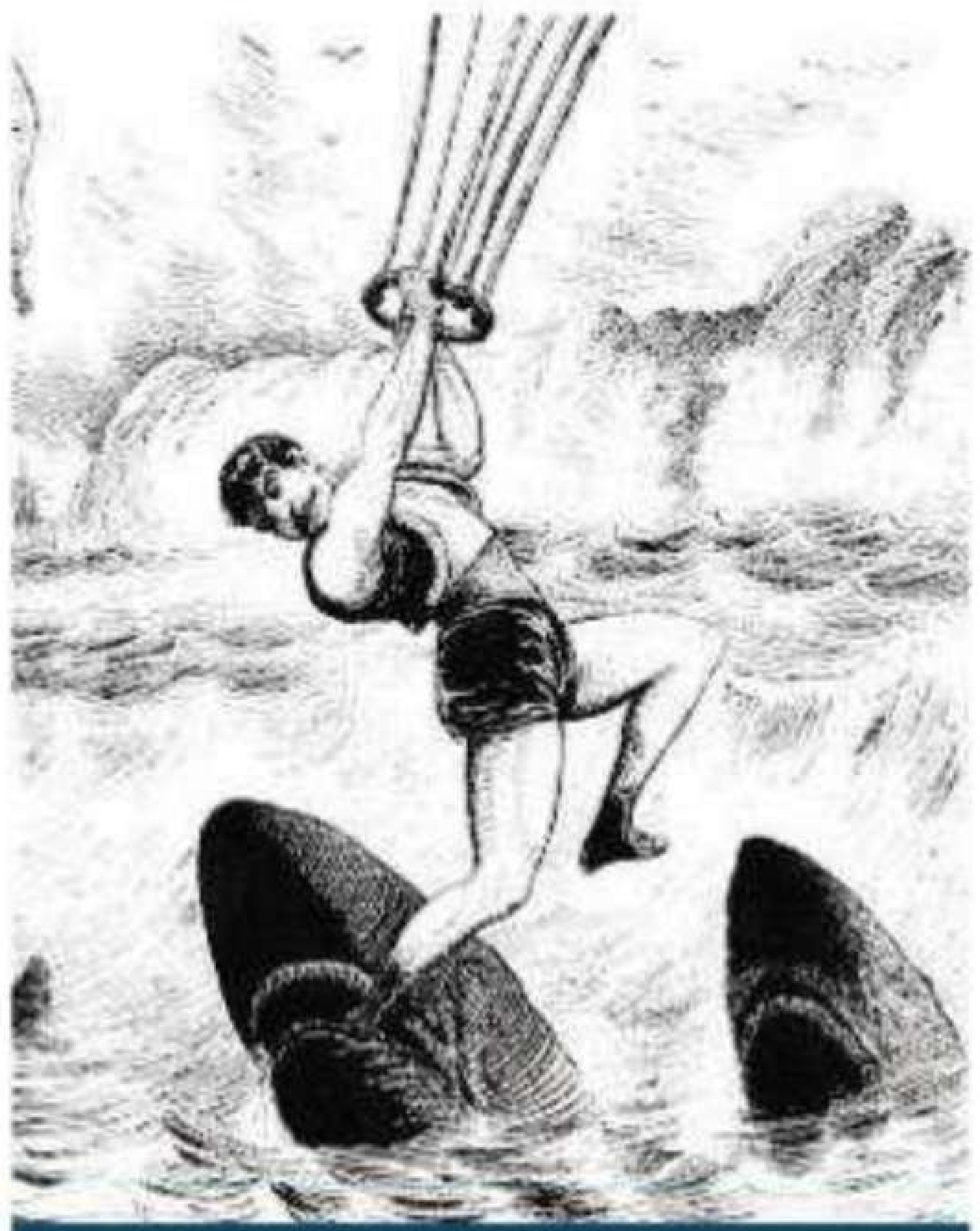

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editorial

Strange voices

UnConvention updates

Preparations for this year's UnConvention (12–13 November) continue, and the final line-up promises to be a memorable one, hopefully with something for everyone.

We'll be welcoming back some familiar favourites, although not necessarily speaking on familiar topics: for instance, the infamous duo of Roberts and Clarke (the Morecombe and Wise of ufology – or should that be Burke and Hare?) will be steering clear of saucers and focusing their attention on cursed stones and fatal ghosts instead. UnCon would be unthinkable without the erudite offerings of Jan Bondeson, so expect to be regaled with tales of super-intelligent talking canines and their perhaps not-quite-so-bright owners.

Speaking of voluble creatures, Alan Murdie's references to Gef the Talking Mongoose got the audience excited last year, so we're pleased to welcome Gef expert (and author of our own cover story in *FT269*) Chris Josiffe to update us on this strangest of cases.

If talking dogs and a singing mongoose weren't enough, Sarah Angliss will be taking us back to the earliest days of audio recording and Edison's idea of capturing the voices of the dead. Sarah promises a live demonstration involving wax cylinders and 'music from the æther' conjured up on the theremin.

Professor Brian Regal will be arriving from the US to tell us about the life and work of Grover Krantz, the scientist who championed Sasquatch – only to find himself cold-shouldered by academics and Bigfoot-hunters alike.

And making his eagerly-awaited first UnCon appearance for the best part of a decade is the one and only Jon Ronson, who'll be making us take 'The Psychopath Test'; we await the results with some concern.

We also hope to be able to bring you a brand new film about the late, lamented and quite simply irreplaceable Ken Campbell, whose own UnCon appearances are the stuff of fortean legend. And there's even talk of another legend in his own lunchtime, the great Hunt Emerson, putting in an appearance! See the ad on the facing page for more details, or go to www.forteantimes.com/events/uncon2011/ to book your tickets.

For those of you with sufficient energy left at the end of the day, we'll also be running a special UnCon Late event on the Saturday night just around the corner from the main venue: expect a grand *Fortean Times* Pub Quiz (with prizes galore), entertainment of a distinctly eccentric nature and the chance to imbibe at leisure with your fellow forteans until late into the evening. Watch this space or check online for further details.

Faith and forteana

The links between religious experience and fortean phenomena are both long-standing and numerous, and in this issue we focus on a broad range of them covering a vast span of history – from simulacra found in the Hebrew Bible, or Tanakh, to a mediæval treasure trove of holy relics, and from a controversial letter which supposedly revealed a 'Secret' Gospel of Mark to the world of contemporary shamanism (with an S&M twist) and an outbreak of modern 'miracles'.

Our own Ted Harrison was in Ireland over the strange summer of 1985 when statues of the Virgin were seen to move at sites all over the country and the faithful and curious flocked in their thousands to remote shrines to see for themselves. But what *did* they see? Twenty-six years on, Ted looks back at his own experiences and asks just what was going on at this particular time, and in this particular place, that could have led to such an extraordinary outbreak of strange phenomena.

Hail and farewell...

The last month has not been an entirely happy one; first we heard of the death of William Corliss, whose remarkable and exhaustive Sourcebook Project continued the work of Charles Fort in cataloguing anomalous data, from its inception in 1974 to his death, in a series of remarkable books. Then, less than a month later, news reached us that Hilary Evans, whose contribution to the wider and better understanding of ufological phenomena and visionary experience was equally vital, had passed away. Both leave a substantial legacy for forteans of the future, and both will be sorely missed. We'll bring you full obituaries in upcoming issues of *FT*.

In the mainstream media, it was of course the tragic death of singer Amy Winehouse and the victims of Norwegian mass-murderer Anders Breivik which made the headlines over one awful weekend. We'll be looking at the fortean aspects of both events next issue, where we'll examine the '27 Club' and Breivik's idea of a modern 'Knights Templar'.

Finally, we bid a fond farewell to our web editor, picture researcher, staff writer and all-round good egg Jen Ogilvie, who leaves us after more than six years' loyal service to seek her fortune in Cambodia: good luck, Jen, don't eat the spiders, and keep us up to date with all the local weirdness!

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

BOOK NOW!

FORTEAN TIMES PRESENTS

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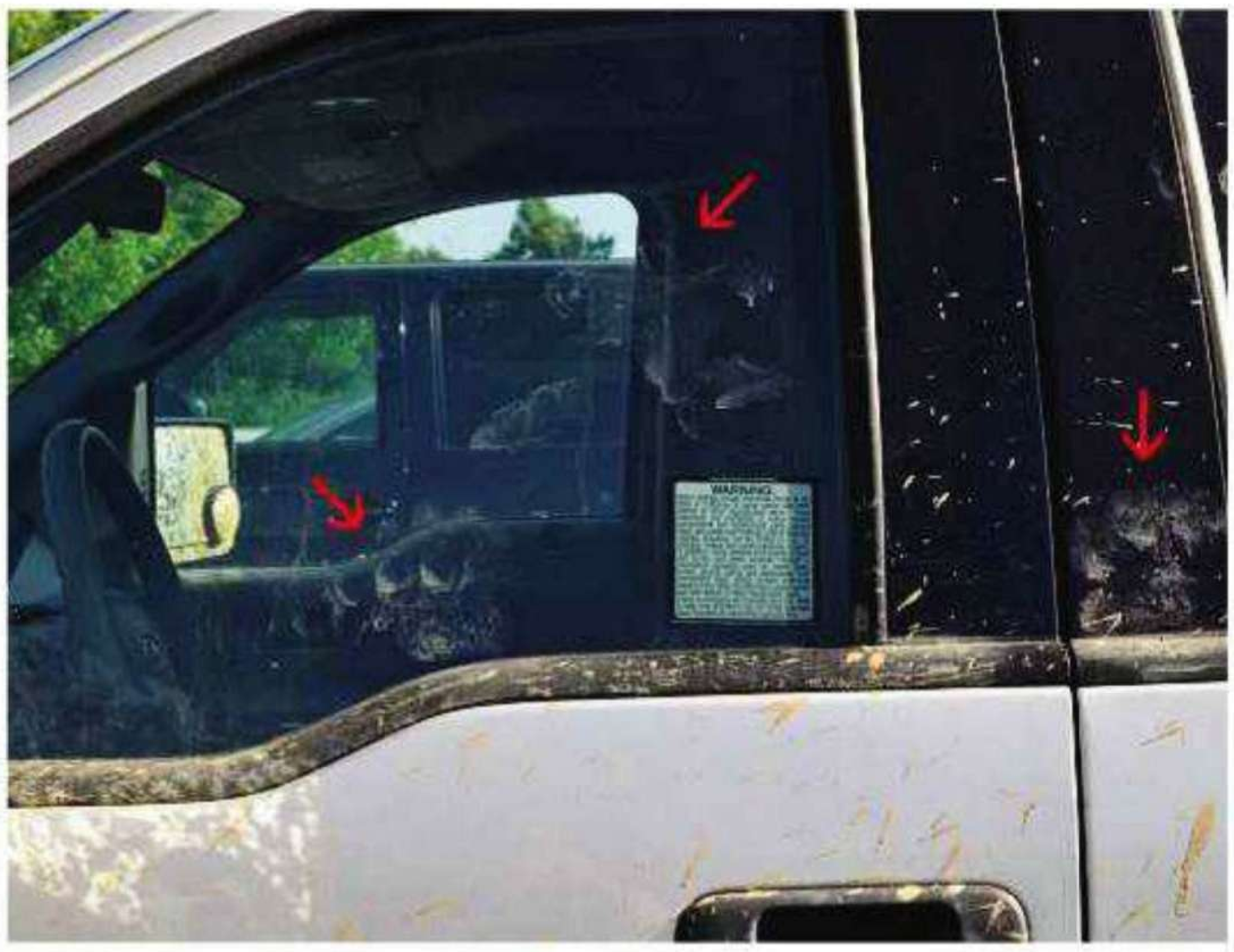
A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

When Bigfoot looked in...

SKYLAIRE ALFVEGREN meets the latest Sasquatch searchers to come forward with evidence for the elusive man-beast at a recent press conference in central California.

GREG BISHOP


SANGER PARANORMAL SOCIETY

Jeffrey Gonzalez made a declaration at a recent press conference held in the shadow of California's Sierra Nevada mountains: "We have what may be the best evidence for what the North American Indians call Sasquatch."

Armed with motion detectors and camera equipment, David Raygoza had logged thousands of hours hiking the remote area – on a "mission" since stumbling upon tracks 18 years earlier – and had initially contacted Gonzalez's Sanger Paranormal Society to examine his photos. An expedition was planned. Gonzalez, Raygoza and a group of experienced outdoorsmen had spent Memorial Day weekend (end of May) camped 5,500ft (1,700m) up in the rugged range at a spot where Raygoza had been led by Native American elders. "We didn't go there willy-nilly," Gonzalez said. "They've been there a long time."

Days of "rain, snow, rain", preceded a snowstorm, which the troupe beat a hasty retreat to avoid, abandoning Gonzalez's food-laden pick-up truck. With his laptop and video gear still in the cab, he asked fellow expedition member Allan Thomas to drive him up to retrieve it. "You don't want to walk around there alone," Gonzalez said. "You have bear, mountain lion, Sasquatch." What they found was a series of trees, seemingly "ripped from their roots", blocking the road leading to their camp. "It took four people to push the biggest one out of the road," Gonzalez said.

But that wasn't all. Food in the truckbed was untouched, but a series of greasy impressions were found all over the rest of it. "Something had stopped and looked in," said Gonzalez. "It raised the hair on the back of my neck."

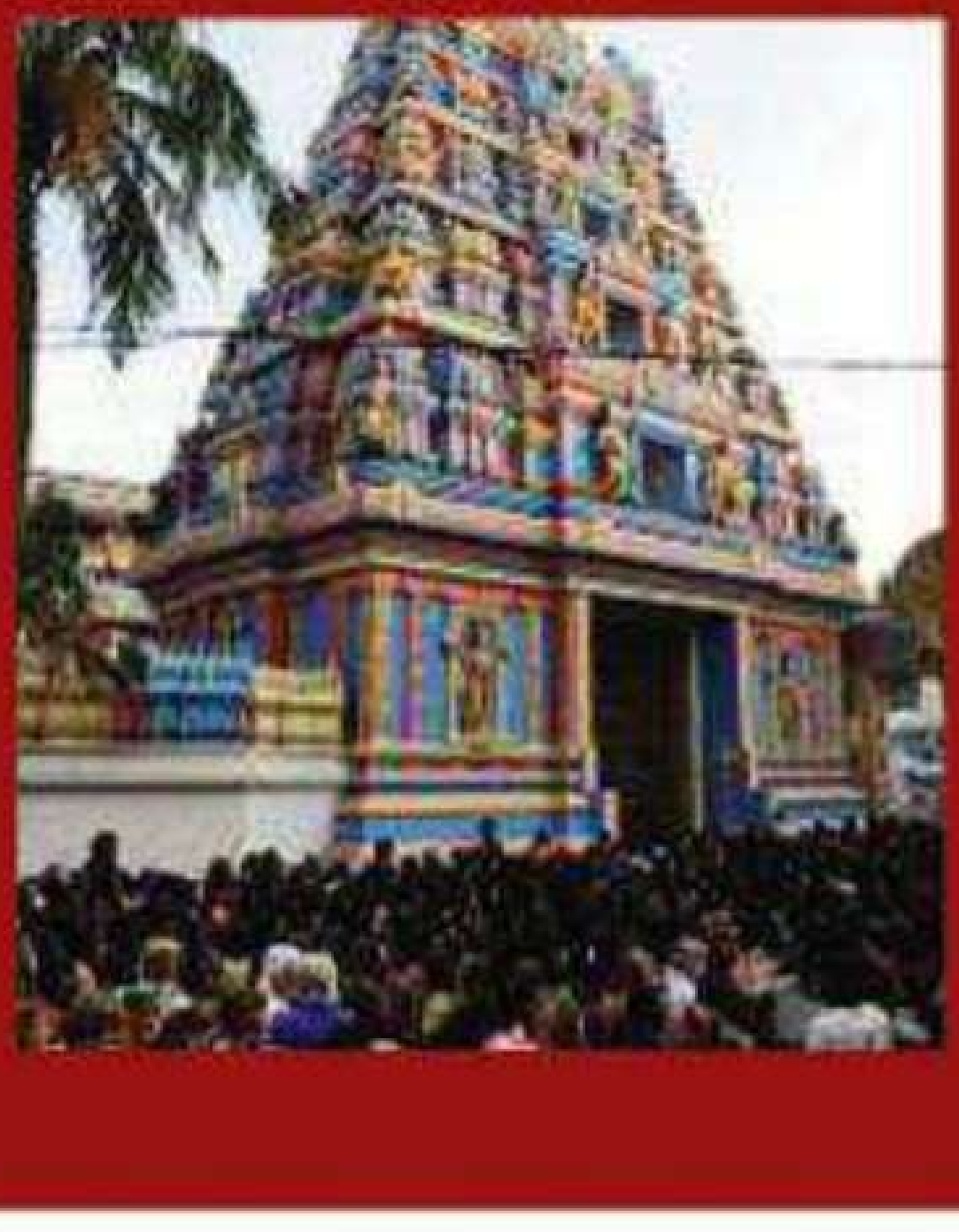
"After a bit of hooting and hollering," Gonzalez says, he "treated the truck as if it had been vandalised." The massive storm had washed away any footprints, but the number of prints all over the truck was impressive – and a potential source of DNA. "Oil sticks. The fact is, if you touch or even breathe on something, DNA can be extracted from that," noted Mickey Burrow, who boasts 14 years of experience as a crime scene investigator. "And cold weather preserves its integrity." After a presentation of photographs and some intriguing video Raygoza had taken over the years, Burrow compared the prints left on the truck with the facial features of possible, more mundane culprits. "If it were a mountain lion, it'd have to be 20ft [6m] wide." [*sic*]

The found a series of trees ripped from their roots

Major American news networks ran a live feed of the press conference, which attracted an assortment of curious locals. One woman asked if they believed bears feared Bigfoot. "What about dermal ridges?" inquired a serious-looking 20-something. Burrow answered at length, explaining that dermal ridges keep us "from falling down", but Gonzalez lamented that such prints, if any, were probably destroyed when he drove the truck down the mountain, when conditions were still so hazardous he blew out two tyres.

The fact that the press conference – both an announcement, perhaps premature, and a plea for assistance to examine the DNA – was so hastily assembled, coupled with the witnesses' sheer earnestness and lack of media savvy, left this writer intrigued.

"Both Jeff and David are well known in the community," explained Leon Windham, a mechanic and three-time Bigfoot witness from nearby Tulare. "David is one of the most



TREASURE RETRIEVED
Huge hoards in a temple, a palace and a guru's home
PAGEs 12–13

EXORCIST IN ACTION
Brother Hermes performs ritual to remove the evil spirits
PAGE 14

VIETNAM WAR UFOS
Military records reveal GIs' accounts of strange objects
PAGE 28

dedicated, time-wise. And that altitude is no joke."

It was three years ago that two Georgia-based opportunists made a similar announcement in nearby Palo Alto, having partnered with "Searching for Bigfoot, Inc." founder Tom Biscardi. Researchers smelled a rat before their plane even landed, and their alleged Sasquatch "corpse" was found to be an elaborate movie prop (see **FT241:6**).

"We kept our discovery a secret for three weeks," Gonzalez said. "We've been slammed on the Internet. What we have here is something we need to show the world, because we don't know what it is. Consider the totality of the circumstances. We have honest evidence. We hope this will encourage those with great evidence to come forward."

For even those obsessed with the unexplained, it's difficult to comprehend the impact of Sasquatch until one interacts with witnesses. "You don't know how it is up here!" one local explained. "It's different in 'Squatch territory. Once you've seen one, or heard one, you become obsessed."

Post-conference, Gonzalez and a handful of attendees discussed how to proceed, as well as the differences between "coastal" Sasquatches and those found elsewhere. (This writer learned that Bigfoots are known mimics; extremely agile and stealthy yet capable of intensely loud vocal projections.) One witness suggested finding the lab that analysed hair for *Monster Quest*. Primatological organisations, wild animal parks, and universities were all mooted. A lab would need to have comparative DNA already available in order to run proper tests. Perhaps a zoo with forensics capabilities? "If we went to the Fresno Zoo and said we have possible Sasquatch DNA, they'd probably laugh us off the property," Gonzalez noted, while showing me his still-muddy truck.

Gonzalez, president of the Sanger Paranormal Society and a MUFON district director, has been approached by television ("a cut-throat business") for their evidence. "I wouldn't give this to Matt [Moneymaker, BFRO founder and 'star' of US Animal Planet programme, *Finding Bigfoot*] for $1 million dollars. We do this because it's our passion."

GREG BISHOP

FACING, LEFT: Jeffrey Gonzalez with a Bigfoot print cast from his collection. **FACING, RIGHT**: Imprints on the truck. **LEFT:** Gonzalez and forensics expert Mickey Burrow at the press conference.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Council scuttles Red Spider plan

Whitstable Times (Kent), 10 Mar 2011.

Mice are found to be skilled singers

Shropshire Star, 10 Mar 2011.

Incognito signs three-year deal

Palm Beach Post, 4 Mar 2011.

Latino population jumps

The Press Democrat (Santa Rosa, CA), 9 Mar 2011.

Death preventable: coroner

The Bunyip (Australia), 2 Mar 2011.

Former neo-Nazi becomes leftist after sex change

The Local (Sweden), 12 Mar 2011.

Mariah Carey, a big hit with goats

D.Telegraph, 16 Dec 2010.

Police search for Moron

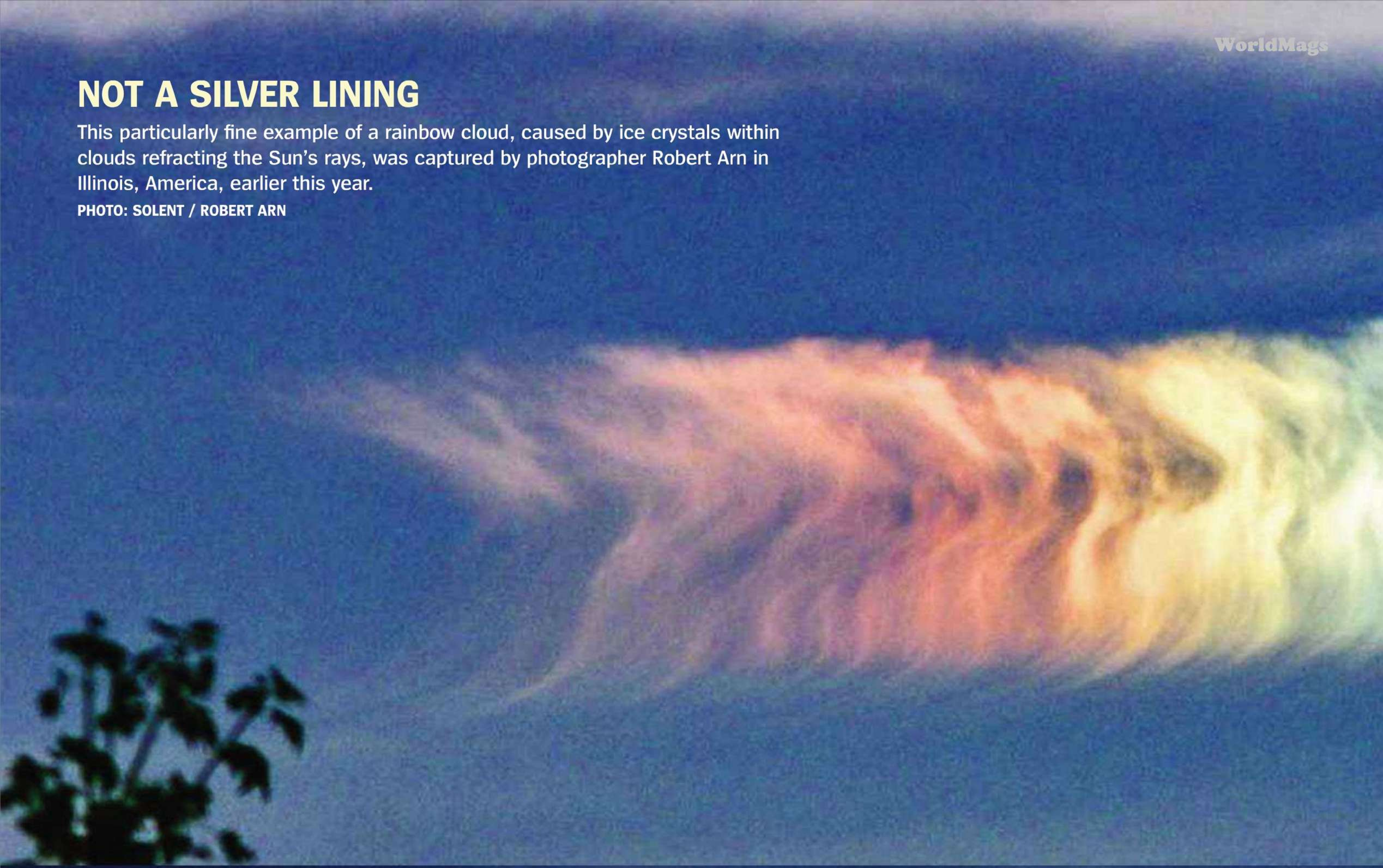
9news.com (Colorado), 21 Jan 2011.

Lawn tells of brush with death on M25

Bradford Telegraph & Argus, 22 Jan 2011.

Badger to give talk

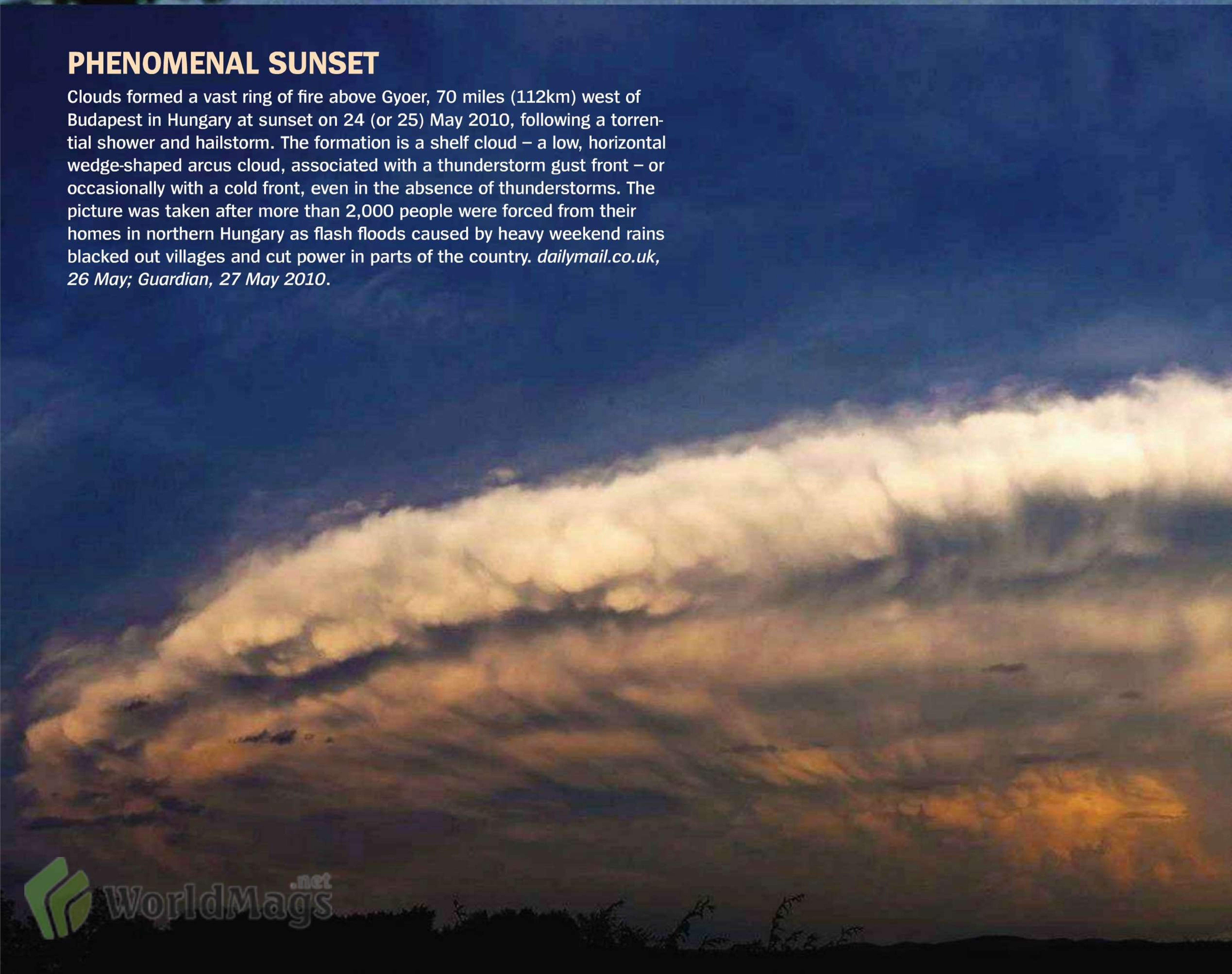
Wolverhampton Express & Star, 15 Feb 2011.



NOT A SILVER LINING

This particularly fine example of a rainbow cloud, caused by ice crystals within clouds refracting the Sun's rays, was captured by photographer Robert Arn in Illinois, America, earlier this year.

PHOTO: SOLENT / ROBERT ARN



PHENOMENAL SUNSET

Clouds formed a vast ring of fire above Gyoer, 70 miles (112km) west of Budapest in Hungary at sunset on 24 (or 25) May 2010, following a torrential shower and hailstorm. The formation is a shelf cloud – a low, horizontal wedge-shaped arcus cloud, associated with a thunderstorm gust front – or occasionally with a cold front, even in the absence of thunderstorms. The picture was taken after more than 2,000 people were forced from their homes in northern Hungary as flash floods caused by heavy weekend rains blacked out villages and cut power in parts of the country. *dailymail.co.uk, 26 May; Guardian, 27 May 2010*.

SIDELINES...

NESSIE SURFACES

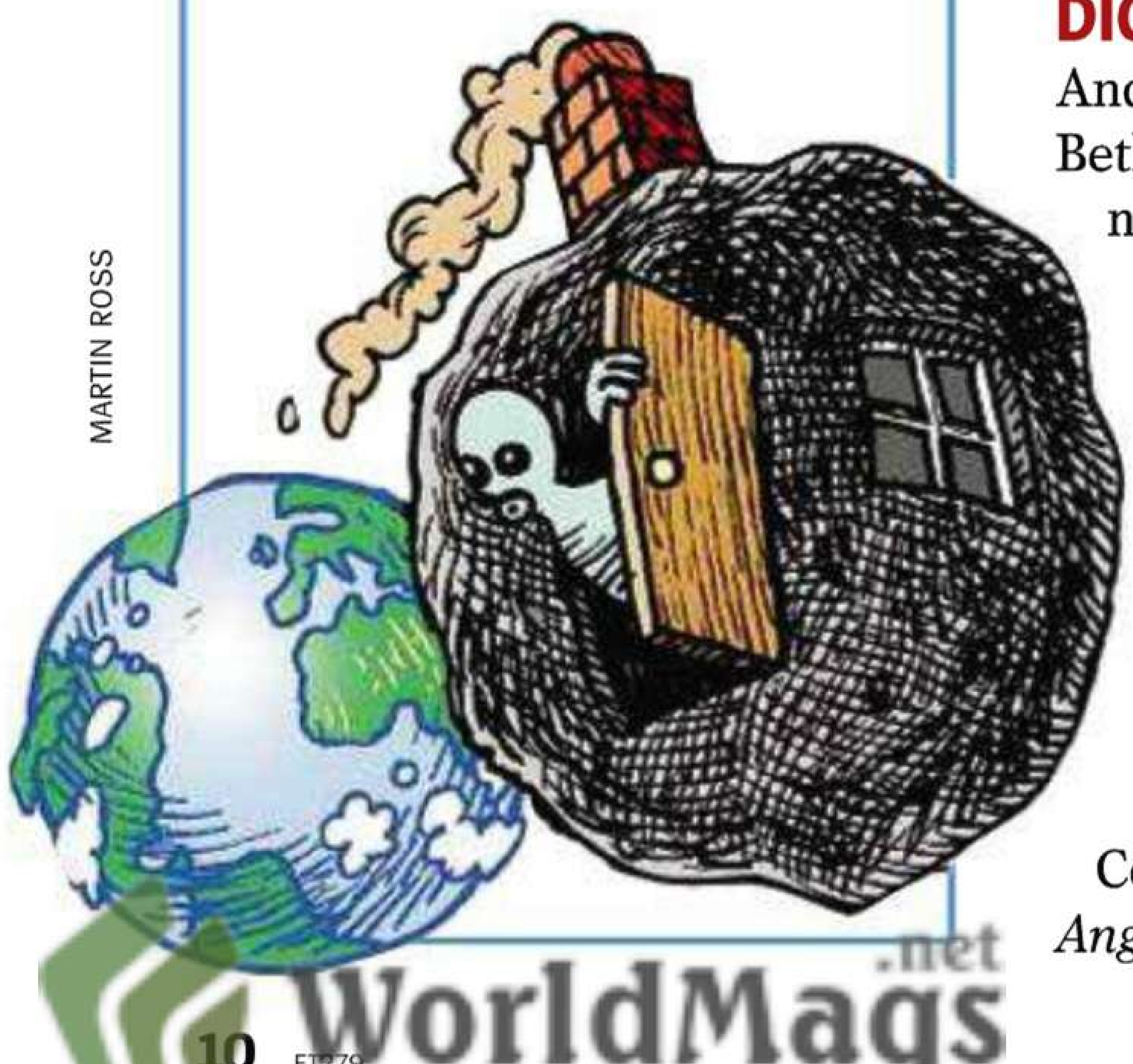
Jan and Simon Hargreaves, who run a shop and café in Foyers overlooking Loch Ness, believe they have caught sight of Nessie. Though it was quite a distance from their vantage point, Mrs Hargreaves, 51, said it had a long neck, too long to be a seal, and it appeared to be black. "It went under the water and disappeared for probably 30 to 40 seconds and then came back up again," she said. "It was around for a good five minutes." *Inverness Courier, 21 June 2011*.

MINI NUPTUALS

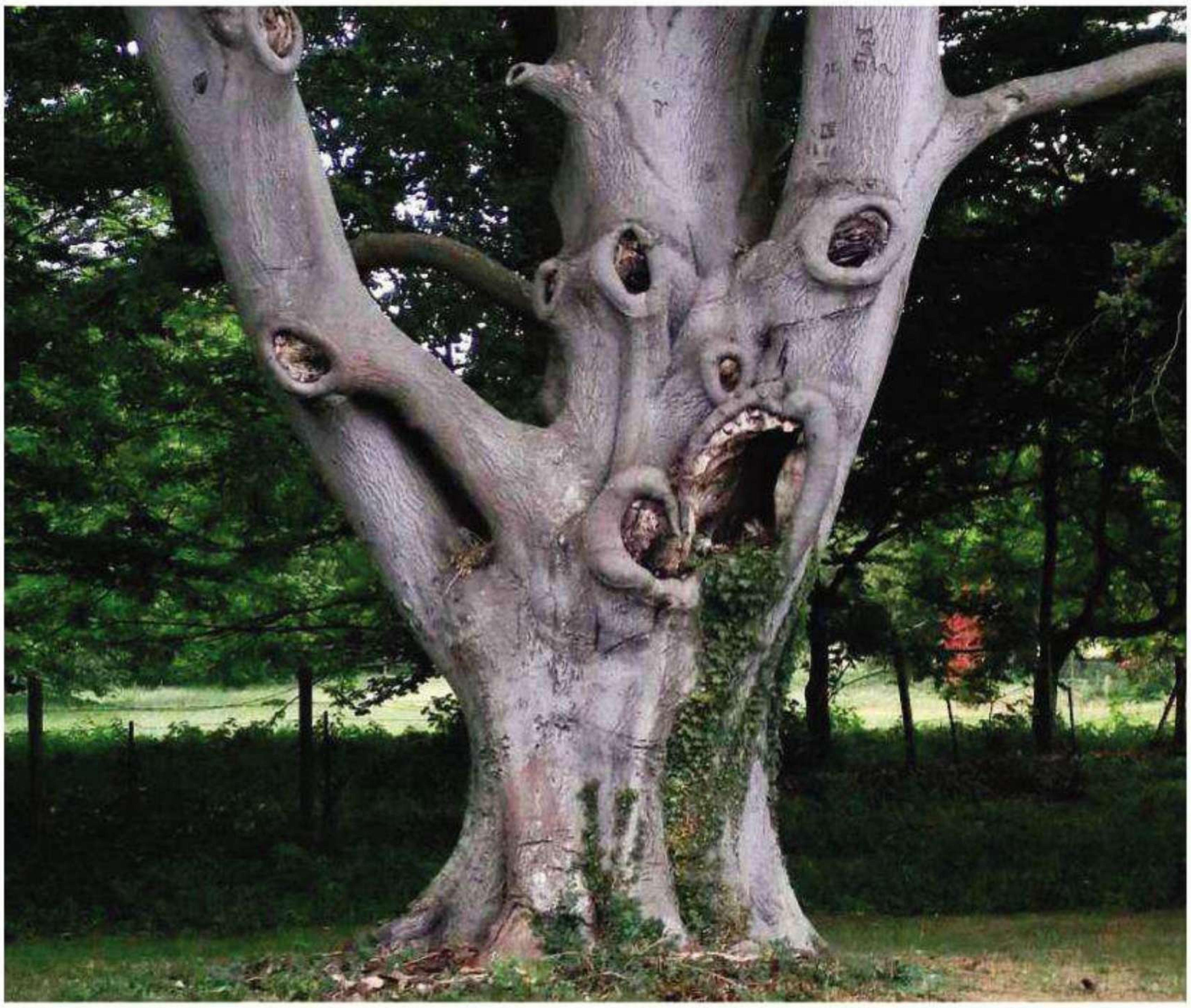
Zhu Jie became a real Thumbalina when she married her prince charming in a Chinese fairytale theme park. The 3ft 9in (1.14m) 23-year-old married 3ft 7in (1.09m) Qin Xueshi at the Kingdom of Discovery Park in Dalian, Liaoning province. *Metro, 5 April 2011*.

CLOSE CALL

An asteroid the size of a house missed the Earth by a mere 7,600 miles (12,200km) at 6pm UK time on 27 June in one of the closest encounters ever recorded. Amateur astronomers captured images of the 65ft (20m)-wide rock as it whizzed at 12,000 mph (19,000km/h) above the south Atlantic. On 8 November, a 50 million-ton asteroid called 2005 YU55, which is 1,300ft (400m) wide, will pass closer than the Moon. *D.Mirror, Sun, 28 June 2011*.


MARTIN ROSS

Spontaneous images

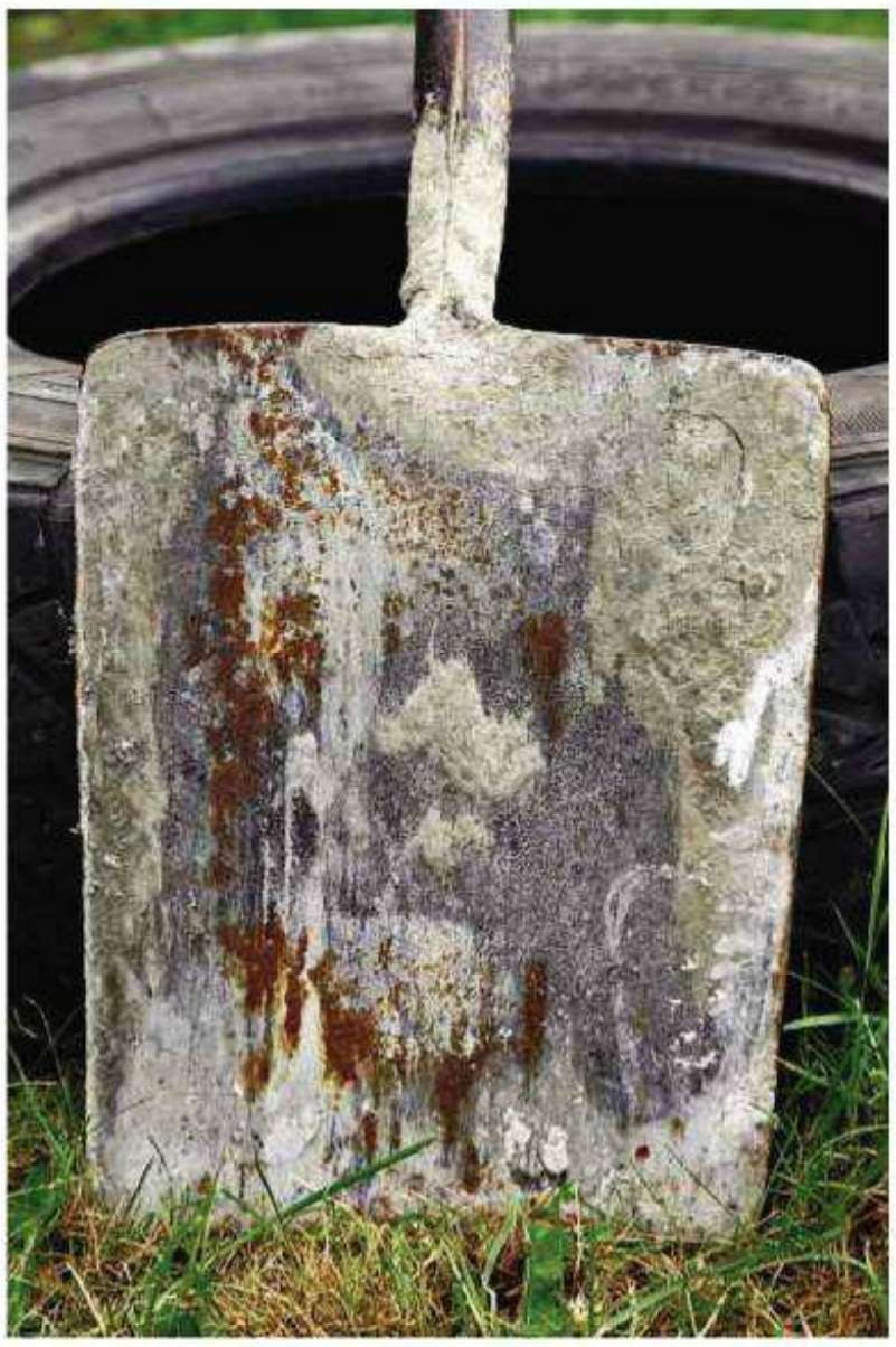

NEWSTEAM INTERNATIONAL

SCREAMING TREE

This scary-looking 70ft (20m) beech tree – with its staring eyes, crooked teeth and drooling mouth – is in the grounds of Stowlangtoft Hall, a nursing home in Suffolk. Some have compared it to the Whomping Willow in the Harry Potter books and films. The photograph was taken by David Garnham, 49, a maintenance technician from Bury St Edmunds. "I was going to get the picture blown up to A3 to donate to the home," he said, "but you can just imagine one of the old ladies waking up and thinking 'the Grim Reaper's come for me'." *D.Mail, D.Mirror, 11 June 2011.*

DIGGING JESUS

Andrea Jones was having a cigarette in her garden in Bethesda, Gwynedd, over the Easter weekend when she noticed the image of a face on her boyfriend's shovel, which was leaning against a rabbit hutch. "I thought it looked a bit like Jesus and pointed it out to my boyfriend Neil and he agreed, but we needed other people to have a look at it to make sure we weren't imagining it. I got my neighbour in, and he's a Buddhist, even he agreed with us and just about everyone who's seen it has gone 'Oh my God!' The rust even looks like blood from the crown of thorns." The last time the shovel was used was at St Joseph's church in Colwyn Bay where Neil Jones was working. *Bangor and Anglesey Mail, 11 May 2011.*


RICHARD BIRCH / BANGOR AND ANGLESAY MAIL

Lost in the wilderness

Tragic deaths and miracle rescues from around the world

PA PHOTOS / AP

Rita survived on melted snow, nuts and dried fruit

On 19 March, Rita and Albert Chretien (right) set off from their home in Penticton, British Columbia, close to the US border, and drove south *en route* to a trade fair in Las Vegas, Nevada. They took a scenic route along back roads, but their 2000 Chevrolet Astro van got stuck in mud on a logging road through a ravine in Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in north-east Nevada. The remote area has no mobile phone coverage. After struggling for three days to free the vehicle, Albert Chretien, 59, set off on his own on foot armed only with a GPS unit in an attempt to find help. Rita Chretien, 56, survived on melted snow and tiny amounts of trail mix (nuts and dried fruit), which she ate sparingly for 49 days.

On 6 May, she was found by elk antler-collectors on all-terrain vehicles taking advantage of the first good weather in Nevada following an extreme winter. She was severely malnourished, having lost 30lb (14kg), and was unable to keep down the food they gave her. At the time of the reports, she was being treated in hospital in Twins Falls, Idaho, and was recovering well. Doctors said she could not have lasted much longer in the wild.

When the couple failed to return home on 30 March, a search had been launched in Oregon, where they had last been seen on CCTV at a shop in Baker City. The Mounties, along with Baker City police and other agencies, searched 3,000 sq miles (7,770 sq km) of wilderness, but were hampered by heavy snow and the rugged terrain, and gave up two weeks before Mrs Chretien was discovered. Her son Raymond said the family was amazed to hear she had been found alive. There was no news of her husband, whose chances of survival were thought to be slim. *Mail on Sunday, 8 May; Guardian, D.Telegraph, 9 May; D.Mail, 10 May 2011.*

***FT* is reminded of a melancholy tale from our archives, which we didn't write up at the time. DeWitt Finley, 56, was a fund-raiser for the Christian charity World Vision in San Diego, California, before moving to Montana in the summer of 1994. That autumn, his pickup truck got stuck in the snow as he drove along back roads over the Klamath Mountains in the Siskyou National Forest in Oregon. He put his faith in God and waited with the patience of Job for someone to rescue him. For nine weeks, he sat in the cab of his pickup, checked the days off the calendar in his salesman's day planner and wrote a stack of letters on a legal pad to his two sons, his fiancée and his boss. If only he had stepped out of the truck and followed the road back a mile or two around a corner, he would have found clear pavement leading down the mountain to safety.**

On 22 May 1995, some teenagers who got stuck themselves discovered Mr Finley starved to death in his cab. "I have no control over my life. It's all in His hands. 'His will be done'," he had written to his boss in one of the letters found with his body. "Death here in another month or so, or He sends someone to save me. Yet knowing His will I'm at peace and His grace will prevail. If I'm to finish my life here, please know I'll always be thankful to you and remain your servant. If not – I'll see you in Glory." He kept crossing off the days on his calendar until 19 January. "It was a senseless death," said Jim Kelly, a maintenance worker at Siskyou National Forest. "That's what so sad about it. The Good Lord didn't take care of him." *[AP] 3 June 1995.*

Mary-Anne Goossens, 48, a librarian and mother of two from the village of Stramproy in the Netherlands, took a 10-day holiday in southern Spain, where she disappeared. Her family traced her last known movements on the morning of 17 June to Frigiliana, a well-known setting-off point for excursions into the Sierra Almijara Natural Park. Nineteen days later, climbers found her alive in the bottom of a ravine. She had survived without food or shelter near the source of the Chillar river by drinking water from its banks. A family friend said she had become lost in the mountains after straying off the path. It got dark very quickly and she kept walking, hoping to find a village. After two days she was too weak to continue and decided to stay near water, hoping that someone would find her. A spokesman for the mountain rescue arm of the Guardia Civil said: "It was a difficult rescue as she was in a hard-to-reach area. That she was in such good shape and could even walk after surviving such an ordeal is a true miracle." *D.Telegraph, 7 July 2011.*

SIDELINES...

HOUSE CALL

After months of enduring a leaking pipe that buckled floors and sagged ceilings, an empty house in Marblehead, Massachusetts, called the police on 29 April. The 911 call went out after water short-circuited the phone system, apparently sparking the emergency call. It was recorded as a hang-up and a return call got static. Police found potentially toxic mould, and said the interior might have to be gutted. *[AP] 1 May 2011*.

I'M THE BAD GUY

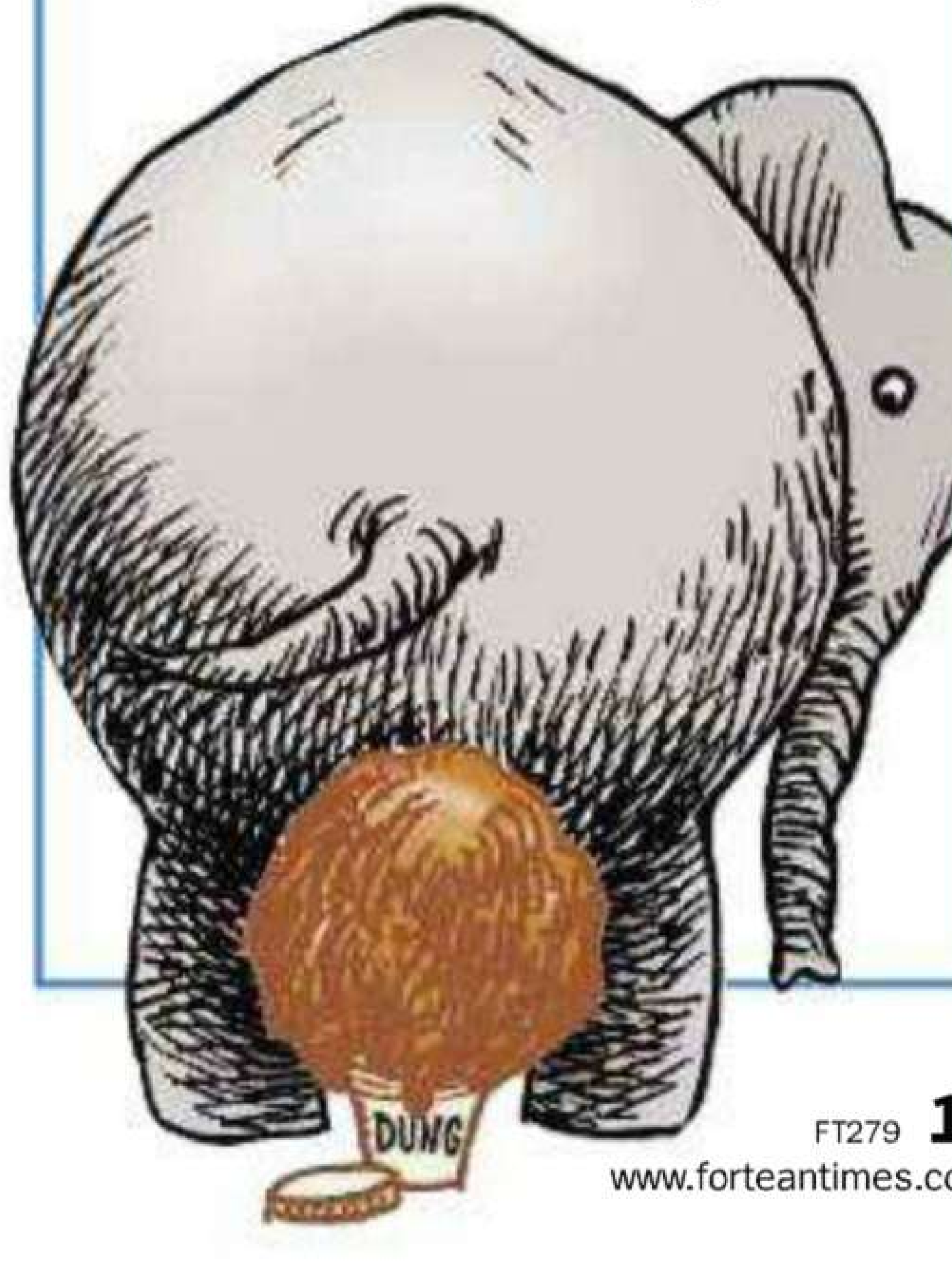
A 33-year-old fireworks tent employee from Orlando, Florida, detonated everything in the tent on 21 June after an altercation with his pregnant girlfriend. He also placed two lit firecrackers in the petrol tank of an employee's car. The firebug's name was Guy Fowlkes – yes really. *Orlando Sentinel, 21 June 2011*.

DISSIDENT REVENANT

The ghost of Alexander Solzhenitsyn is said to appear daily at a farm taken from the Russian author's grandparents by the KGB. The ball of light is his "ghost come home to rest", said a neighbour in Novokubansk. *Metro, 27 May 2011*.

DUNG DEALS

Prague Zoo has started selling cartons of elephant dung to gardeners for use as fertiliser. The brain behind the project is zoo director Miroslav Bobek, whose surname means 'dung'. About 200 of the one-kilo (2.2lb) containers were being sold every weekend. *(Brisbane) Courier-Mail, 16 May 2011*.



MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

TWINS SHARE BODY

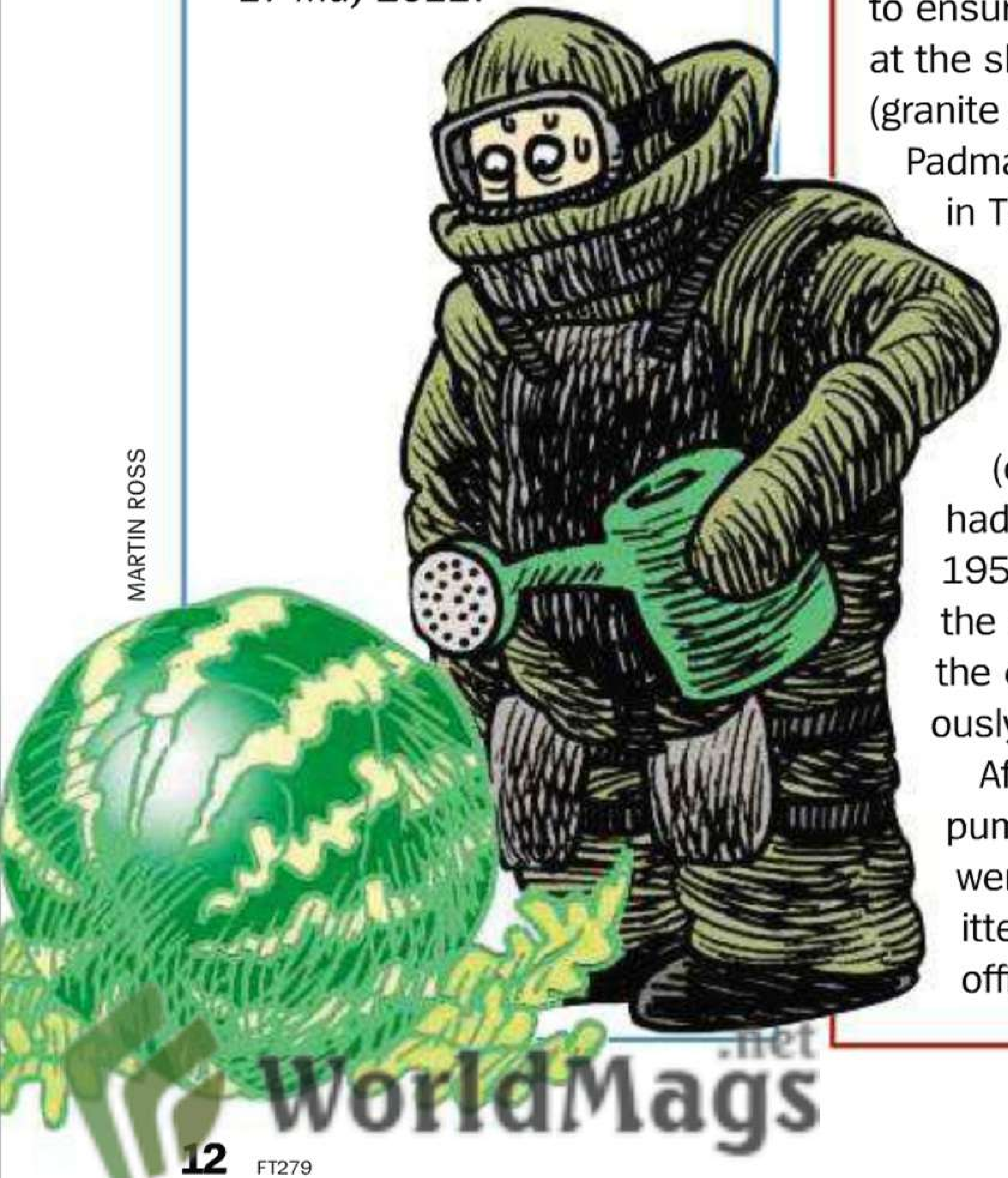
Conjoined baby girls with a single body and two heads were born in Suining City, Sichuan province, southwestern China, on 5 May. The twins weighed 9lb (4kg) and measured 20in (51cm). They had two spines and two œsophaguses, but shared other organs. *[AP] 11 May 2011*.

EQUALLY CULPABLE

A date arranged online went awry for a Canadian man when the woman turned out to be his current girlfriend. When the 49-year-old woman arrived at a Barrie coffee shop in Ontario on 1 May, she threw coffee in his face and slapped him. She was arrested by an off-duty policeman and held on assault charges. *MX News (Sydney), 4 May 2011*.

EXPLODING MELONS

Watermelons in China's eastern Jiangsu province have been "exploding like landmines". About 20 farmers and 111 acres (45ha) of watermelon around Danyang city were affected in May. Some farmers had sprayed excessive quantities of the growth accelerator forchlorfenuron in wet conditions to try and boost profits by getting the fruit to market early – but other farmers who hadn't sprayed also had exploding fruit. *BBC News, D.Telegraph, 17 May 2011*.



MARTIN ROSS

BURIED TREASURE

OLD PALACES AND TEMPLES REVEAL VAST WEALTH HIDDEN FROM THE PUBLIC GAZE

LEFT: Indian police move to protect the Kerala temple treasure.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP

KERALA SHRINE

Six ancient vaults beneath a 16th-century temple in southern India were opened up, starting on 27 June, after an order from the Indian Supreme Court that the temple be managed by the state to ensure the security of valuables at the shrine. Two of the *kallaras* (granite chambers) under the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, the ancient capital of Kerala, were sealed with boulders and had not been opened since the 1860s (or 1872); the other four had been closed since the 1950s. All are located deep in the recesses of the temple at the end of a dark and dangerously steep flight of stairs.

Mountains of gold and gems were valued in the billions

After being illuminated and pumped full of oxygen, they were examined by a committee of judges, religious officials and archæologists, in the presence of Thirunal Marthanda, the 89-year-old custodian of the temple and head of the former Travancore royal family, which ruled the princely state until Indian independence in 1947.

In 1750, the Travancore Maharajahs styled themselves as servants of Padmanabhaswamy, an avatar of Vishnu, in whose name they ruled and to whom they dedicated much of their wealth. The temple is still controlled by a trust of the Travancore royal family.

The mountains of gold, gemstones and coins were valued at between 500 and 1,000 billion rupees (£7–14 billion). There was a gold necklace 18ft (5.5m) long; a 4ft (1.2m) solid gold statue of Vishnu studded with jewels; other solid gold statues of deities; gold and silver bullion dating back to the East India Company period; sacks of diamonds, emeralds and rubies; crowns and weapons; a ton of gold trinkets; and thousands of intricate pieces of jewellery. Around 14 July, temple custodian Marthanda filed an affidavit to halt the opening of the last vault on the grounds that "the sign of the serpent visible at the entrance indicates that it is not auspicious to open it."

The Supreme Court decided to defer the opening of the chamber, if on the more prosaic grounds of the need to provide better security for the staggering riches already discovered. Then on 17 July, TP Sundararajan, the former policeman who initially obtained the court order to open the vaults, died of a fever aged 70. His family dismissed suggestions that he had fallen victim to a curse. *[AFP] Times, 1+4 July; D.Telegraph, 5+25 July 2011*.

SAI BABA HOARD

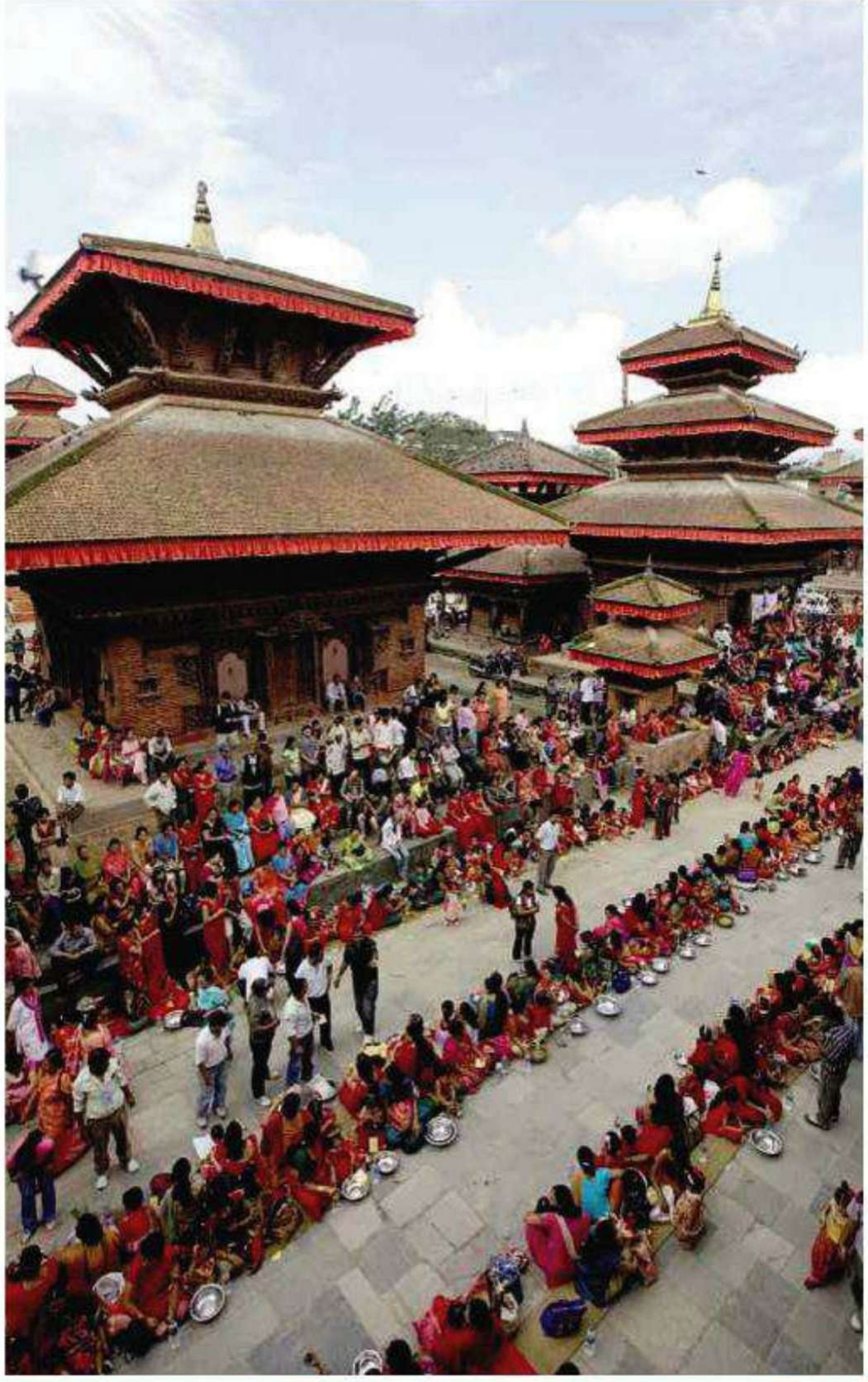
The private chambers of the Indian guru Sathya Sai Baba [obituary **FT276:28–29**] have been found to contain piles of gold, diamonds and cash. The hoard included 115 million rupees (£1.6 million), 216lb (98kg) of gold and 667lb (307kg) of silver. Members of the Sathya Sai Central Trust, which runs the ashram near Puttapathi in Andhra Pradesh (facing, top), bowed to increasingly insistent demands to open the chambers, which had been locked since the guru was hospitalised in March. The Trust said it had immediately paid tax on the hoard's value. "We had no knowledge about the money," said a spokesman. "It was given to Sai Baba and he kept it for public use. He was an embodiment of simplicity and did not even have a bank account of his own. He never kept anything for himself."

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / DIBYANGSHU SARKAR

However, there were rumours of more treasure squirrelled away. "The police have definite intelligence of secret vaults," said a source within the ashram. "They strongly believe the wealth hidden there could be much more than what was actually found, perhaps on a staggering scale." It was suspected that vast sums had already been smuggled out. Police stopped a car carrying Trust members near the border with a neighbouring state and found the equivalent of £50,000 in cash. The Trust said it had been set aside to build a mausoleum for Sai Baba. *Independent, 29 June; Sunday Telegraph, 3 July 2011*.

KHATMANDU PALACE

Workers renovating a former royal palace in Kathmandu, the Nepalese capital, have found a stash of gold and silver jewellery, masks, utensils and coins weighing more than 660lb (300kg). Three boxes of treasure, thought to be over 500 years old, were hidden in a chamber under the sprawling 16th-century Hanuman Dhoka palace (right), a UNESCO heritage site. At the time of the AFP wire report on 28 June 2011, only one box had been opened. Its contents were estimated to be worth 17.5 million rupees (£246,000) on the local precious metal market. The dilapidated palace, which housed the royal family until the late 19th century, is now a museum. Restoration work will go on until September. King Gyanendra was deposed in 2008 when Nepal became a republic.


GETTY IMAGES / AFP / PRAKASH MATHEMA

SIDELINES...

COME IN, NUMBER 1363

A female Antarctic humpback whale has travelled the longest distance recorded for any mammal, swimming almost 6,200 miles (10,000km) between breeding grounds. The whale, designated no. 1363, was observed off the Brazilian coast in August 1999 and not seen again until photographed off eastern Madagascar on 21 September 2001. Was the epic trip deliberate or the result of navigational error? Most long distance migrations are half the distance, and made by males, travelling north or south. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, Metro, 13 Oct 2010*.

WORSHIPPING PUTIN

A bizarre all-female sect living in a village near Nizhny Novgorod, 250 miles (400km) south-east of Moscow, believe Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is a reincarnation of Paul the Apostle. Led by "Mother Fotina", they dress like nuns and pray for Putin's success in front of his portrait and Russian Orthodox icons. They sing patriotic Soviet songs and subsist on turnips, carrots, peas and buckwheat. *D.Telegraph, 13 May 2011*.

SATANIC SACRIFICE

Four goats found slaughtered in Tipton St John, Devon, led to fears of Satanism. The animals were found over four days around Easter, either with their heads twisted backwards or their throats cut. "It has to be some kind of ritual, otherwise it is too much of a coincidence," said Jimmy Small, owner of two of the goats. Police were investigating. *D.Mail, 16 May 2011*.

CONCRETE EVIDENCE

Police responded to a rare sighting of an alligator in Independence (a suburb of Kansas City, Missouri) on 31 May. Seeing its head lurking in weeds leading down to a pond, they fired at its head. Noting the beast hadn't moved, they fired again. When the bullet bounced off its head, they realised it was a concrete lawn ornament. *WDAF-TV, 31 May; dailymail.co.uk, 2 June 2011*.

SIDELINES...

BLOOD RELIC

Four small vials of blood were taken from Pope John Paul II during his final hospital stay and mixed with anticoagulant for a possible transfusion, but were never used. Before his beatification on 1 May, one vial was put in a reliquary and presented for veneration. It was later placed with other relics in the Vatican. *Guardian, 27 April 2011*.

IT'S NOT JAZZ

Spain's Civil Guard descended on the Sigüenza Jazz Festival after an angry jazz buff complained that the Larry Ochs Sax and Drumming Core group was on the wrong side of a line dividing jazz from contemporary music, which he claimed his doctor had warned was "psychologically inadvisable" for him to listen to. The police agreed it wasn't jazz, but the organisers refused a refund. *El Pais (Spain), 9 Dec 2009*.

TWINCHRONICITY

Identical twins John and Chris Atkin from Hull both had emergency appendectomies last February within a week of each other. "We always seemed to know exactly what the other one was going to say," said John, 35. His twin added: "When we were younger, John broke his leg and I felt his pain. My leg swelled up because of it." *Metro, 25 Feb 2011*.

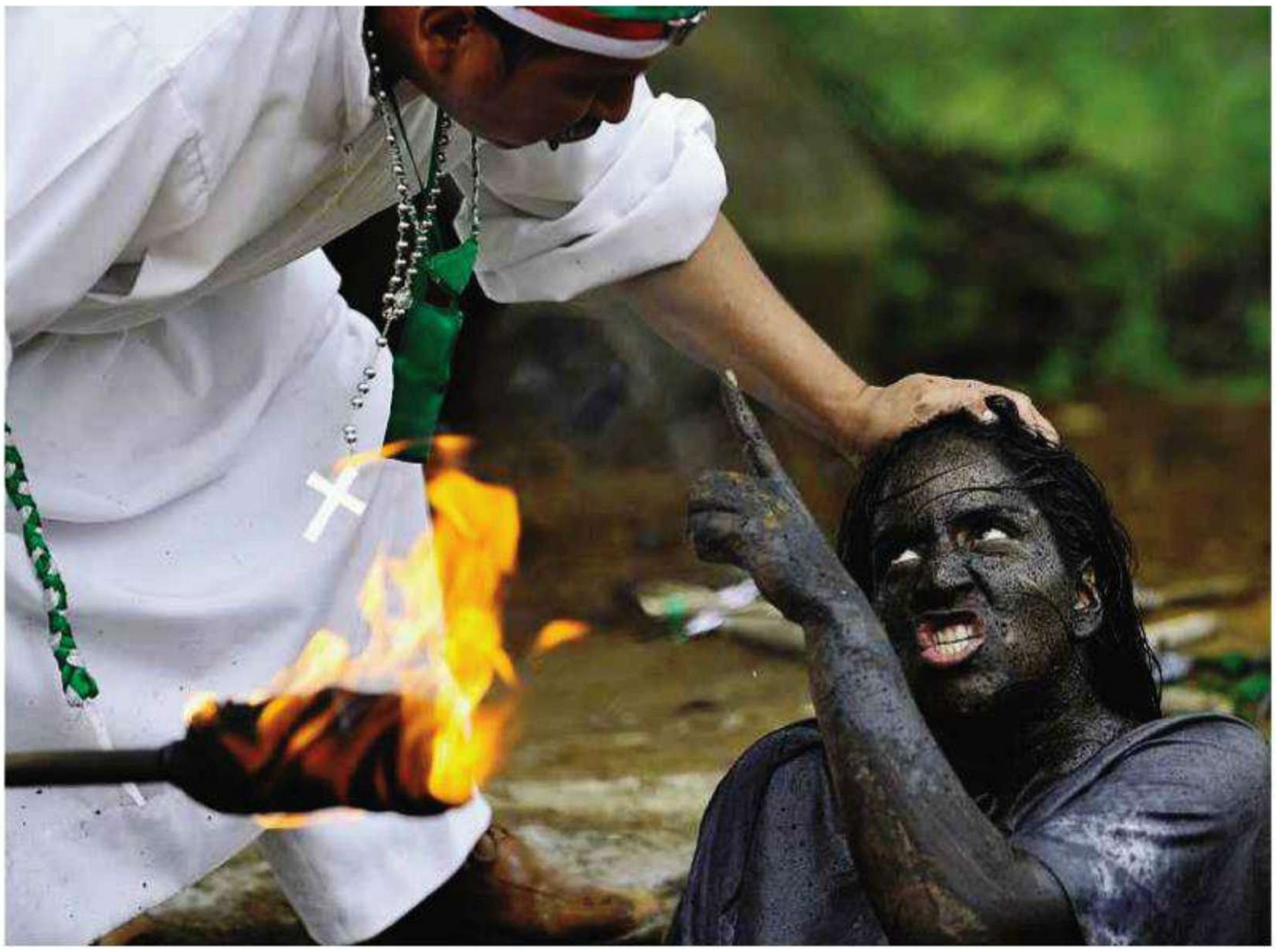
VINE PULLS THROUGH

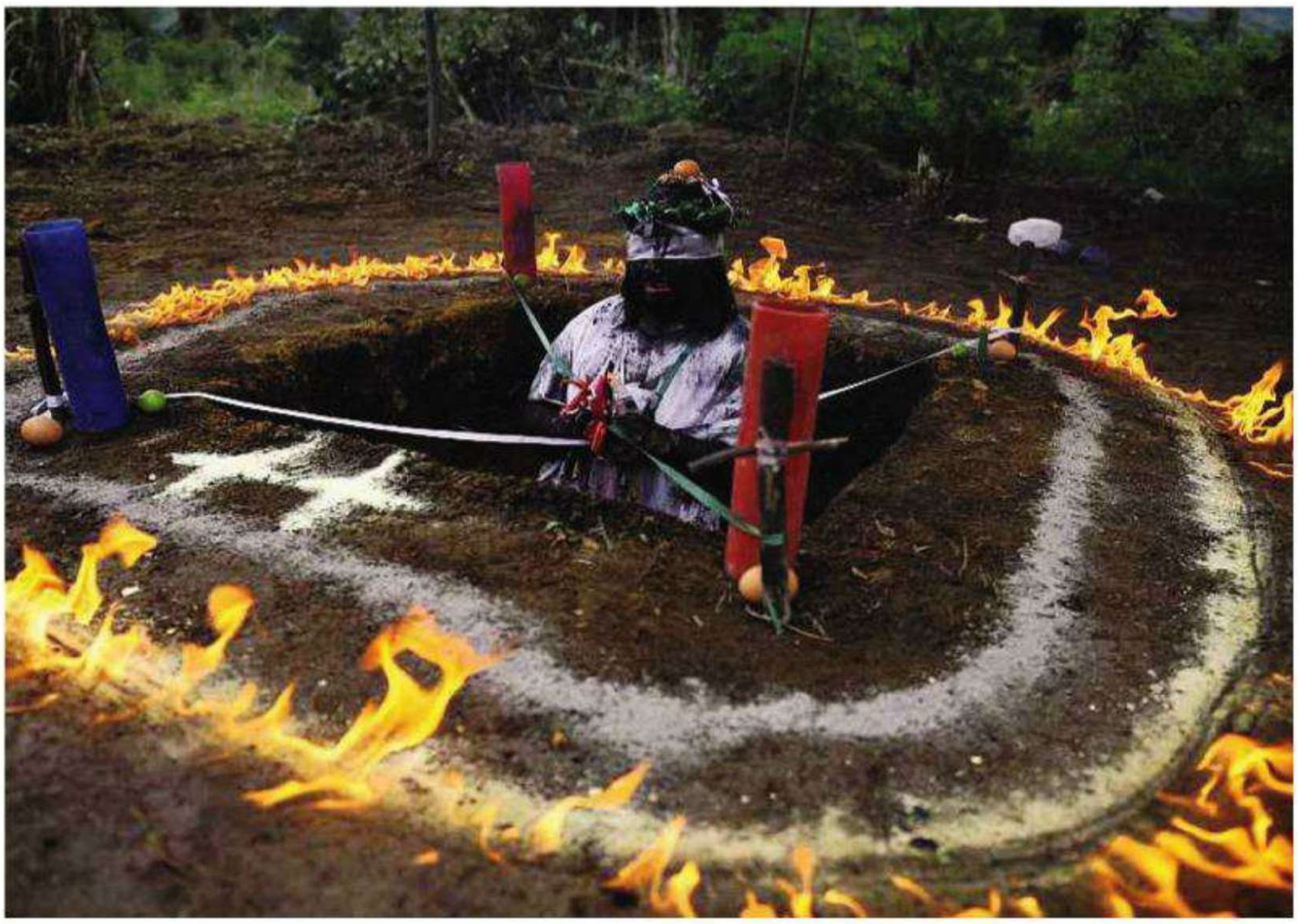
Austrian vintners say a 500-year-old grapevine, an ancestor of the popular veltliner grape, is sending out new shoots after being hacked to pieces by vandals in February. It was thought the vine could bear grapes again within three years. *MX News (Brisbane), 6 May 2011*.

SPENDING A PENNY

A man in Flint, Michigan, complained to police that someone had broken into his house and replaced his old kitchen tap with a new one. He had insurance, so it should make for an entertaining insurance claim. *(Brisbane) Courier-Mail, 17 May 2011*.

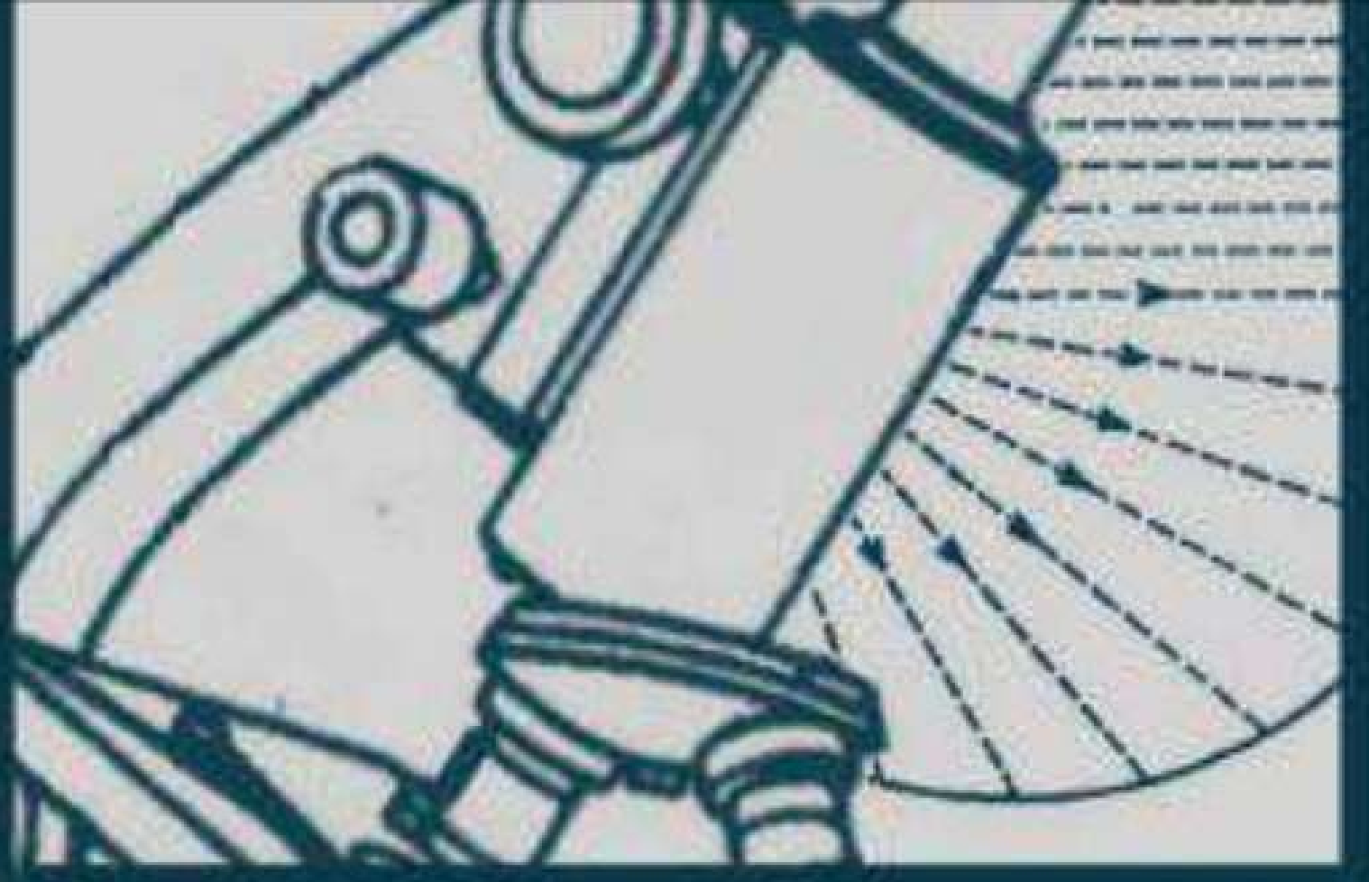
COLOMBIAN EXORCISM





BOTH PIX: GETTY IMAGES / AFP / LUIS ROBAYO

Hermes Cifuentes, 50, known as Brother Hermes, carries out a ritual of exorcism in La Cumbre, western Colombia, on three people possessed by evil spirits. He has done the ritual for the last 20 years. In one picture, we see the white-robed healer waving a blazing torch at Claudia Gaviria, 28, as she rants at him. Another mud-smeared woman – Lilia Rozo, 52 – wears a blindfold and a wreath topped with an egg. *Sun, Metro, Guardian, 3 June 2011*.



MATT PATTINSON

THE WEIRDEST PEOPLE

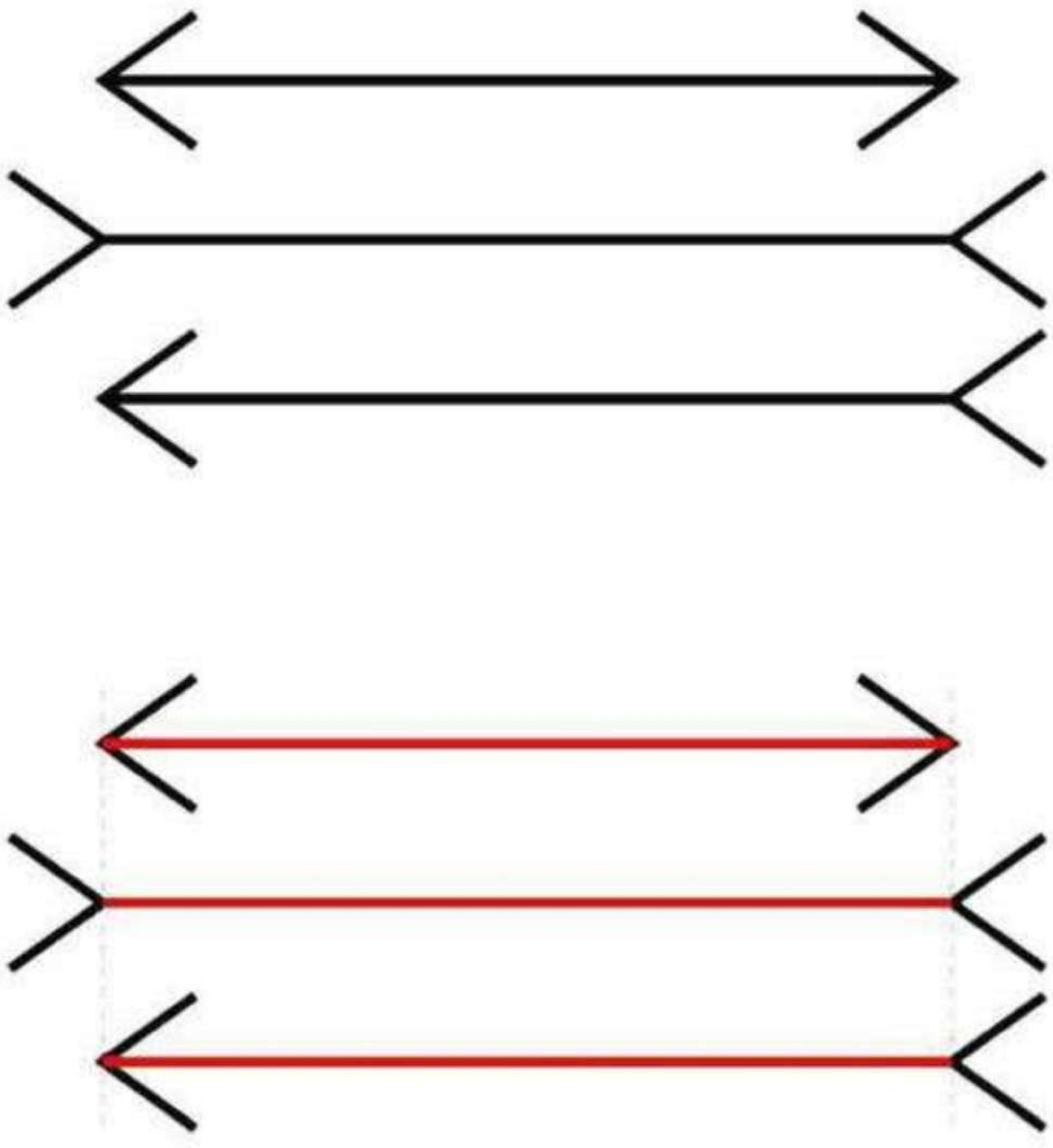
From the 'person in the street' to the one on the 'Clapham omnibus', the typical character is a well-known reference – but, asks **DAVID HAMBLING**, does he or she even exist?

A paper entitled "The Weirdest People in the World" in the *Journal of Behavioural and Brain Sciences* threatens to undermine a vast section of modern psychology.[1] Published by Joseph Henrich and his colleagues at the department of psychology in the University of British Columbia, it locates a key flaw across most psychology experiments: the research has been carried out using weird people as test subjects. Weird people, that is, like you.

Selecting your sample of guinea pigs is vital for any behavioural research. If all of your subjects in one group happen to be convicted burglars, you might find that they had substantially different attitudes from those of a second group consisting entirely of nuns. Arguably, neither is very representative of the population as a whole. A survey on attitudes to property and crime based on either group's responses might be very misleading.

Henrich looked at papers published in top psychology journals over a four-year period, and found 68 per cent of the subjects were American, and 96 per cent were from Western industrialised countries. Worse, in 71 per cent of them, all the subjects came from the same group: psychology students. Henrich refers to this group as Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic or WEIRD people.

It wouldn't be a problem if WEIRD people were reasonably representative of the world population. Unfortunately, Henrich discovered that in many important ways they are not typical at all. Findings which are supposed to be universals of human nature seem to be specific to WEIRD people, and tell us nothing about humankind as a whole.



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For example, the Müller-Lyer illusion is a standard in psychology textbooks. It shows a line with arrowheads pointing outwards, which looks longer than an identical line with arrowheads pointing inwards. You might think the illusion was hard-wired into human perception, until you start testing people from other cultures. San Bushmen from the Kalahari Desert cannot see the 'illusion'; they judge the lines, correctly, to be the same length. Inuit are the same. Aboriginal Australians, Ghanaians and other groups have different levels of susceptibility to the illusion. The one group for whom it consistently showed up strongly were American students. They are an outlier, and no more representative of the wider population than the San at the other extreme.

Henrich found the same sort of variability in another psychology exercise, this one a test of co-operation called the Ultimatum Game. A player is given a sum of (real!) money to share with a second player. The first player proposes a split – 70/30, 50/50 or whatever – and the second player either agrees, or refuses. If the second player refuses, neither player gets anything and the game is over.

WEIRD people typically offer 50 per cent when playing the Ultimatum Game, and an offer below 30 per cent is often rejected. Researchers have claimed this shows that, as a species, we have an innate sense of fairness, and will punish a player who tries to make an unfair offer by refusing. However, Henrich and his colleagues have played the Ultimatum Game with people from 23 other cultures, including Siberia, New Guinea and Oceania. Only one group had a higher average offer than the American students (the Sursurunga from Papua New Guinea); the others were all lower. For many of them, the best offer for the first player to make was actually a 90/10 split. It seems that the general standard of fair play is very different from what you might expect.

We find curious conditions such as koro, the Malay amok and West African 'brain fog'

A difference also shows up in Fundamental Attribution, the way we judge other people's behaviour. If someone is shouting, we assume it's because they're an angry person; if they drop something, it's because they're clumsy. This is attributing behaviour to a person's fundamental qualities. (We judge ourselves differently: if we shout it's because we've been unreasonably harassed, and we only drop something when it wasn't handed to us properly). However, this type of attribution is a WEIRD thing. It turns out that inhabitants of East Asia, India, Russia, Mexico and other non-WEIRD places think that people's behaviour is likely to be due to the specific situation, and not to fixed personality features.

One can understand that it doesn't help that the majority of WEIRD test subjects are American either, given that the US has been found to be the most patriotic, litigious, optimistic and church-going in the Western world. And that's before you even consider that the WEIRD subjects are students... and psychology students at that.

Henrich concludes that "WEIRD subjects may often be the worst population from which to make generalisations" and that researchers need to take care before claiming that their findings are true of the larger population. Some findings he checked do seem to be universal, including those relating to some other optical illusions, colour perception and number handling.

Forteans have long known that humans are a varied bunch. There are plenty of well-documented and curious conditions that are confined to specific cultures, such as the Malay amok (violent frenzy), koro (belief that the penis is withdrawing into the body with possible fatal effect), West African 'brain fog' (difficulty concentrating and remembering) and North African Zar (spirit possession with laughing, shouting and singing). What we didn't realise was that our own mental normality was quite so unrepresentative of the world as a whole, and that this makes us rather peculiar ourselves – "the weirdest people in the world" according to Henrich.

NOTES

1 http://bit.ly/nL4EgR (iricss.org).

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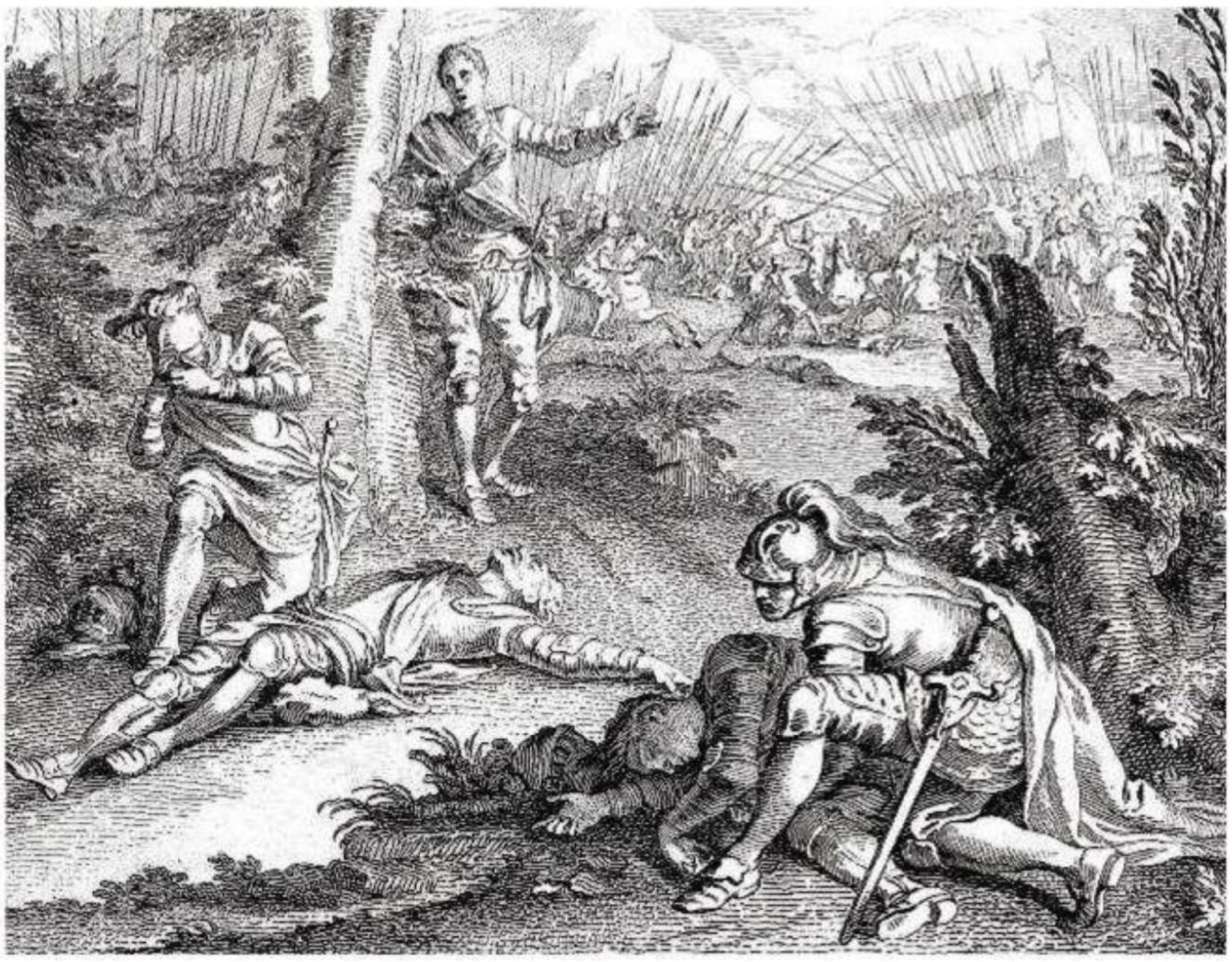
MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

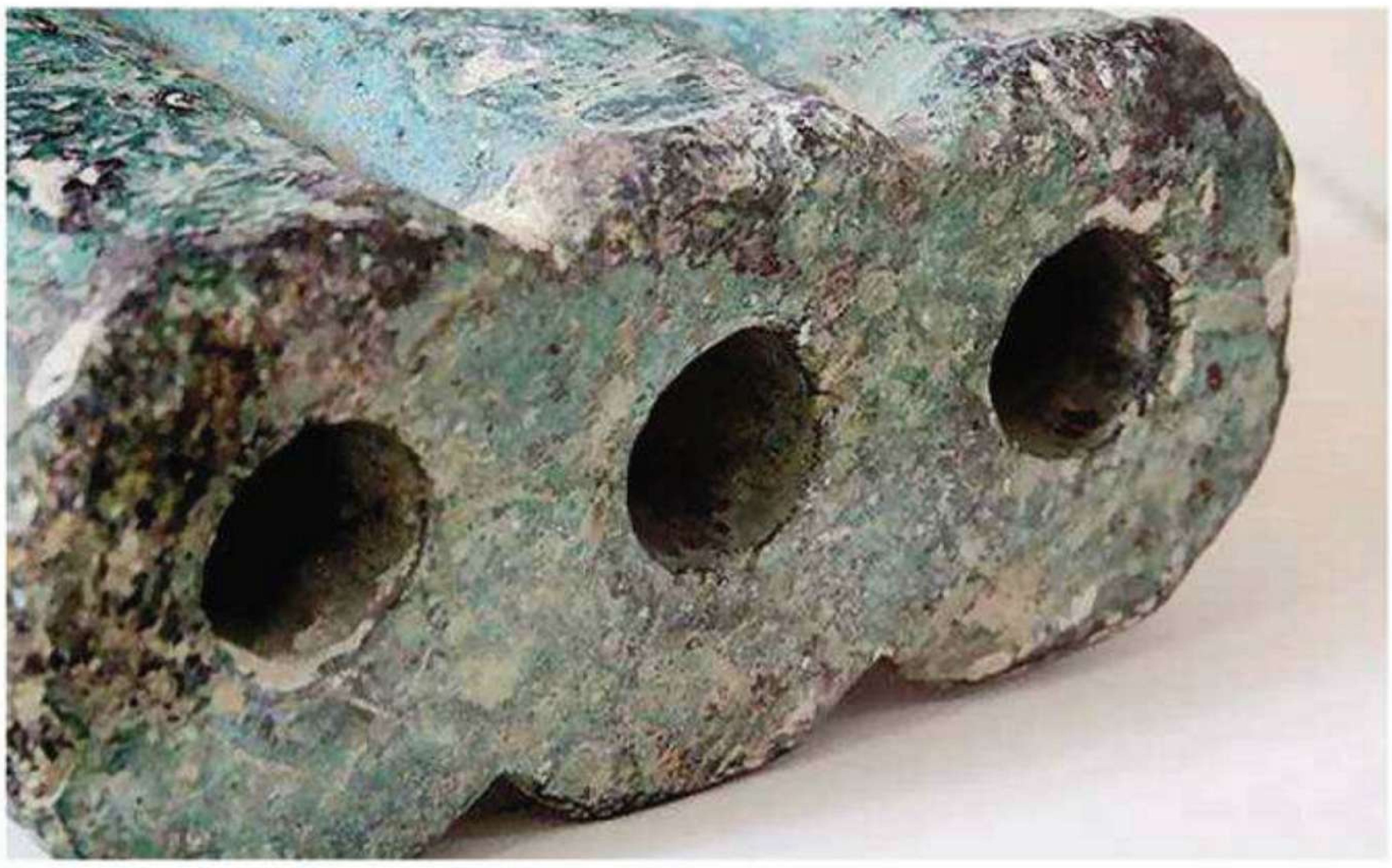
PAUL SIEVEKING on the earliest known use of handguns in a British battle, a possibly unique triple-barrelled cannon, plus evidence that one thing the Romans *didn't* do for us was build the first engineered roads.



LEFT: The Battle of Towton features in 3 Henry VI Act 2 Scene 5, where a father grieves over killing his son, while another son regrets the death of his father.

- Archæologists in Croatia have identified what they believe is the world's only triple-barrelled cannon, designed by Leonardo da Vinci. The 2ft (60cm) bronze cannon, from the late 15th century, with barrels 1½in (38cm) wide, bears a striking resemblance to sketches by Leonardo in his *Codex Atlanticus*. Mounted on a wooden carriage and wheels, it would have allowed a much more rapid rate of fire than single-barrelled guns. It was also lighter and more mobile.

The cannon was found in 1968 by a group of schoolchildren in the grounds of the 15th-century Klicevica fortress in Dalmatia, a part of southern Croatia that had strong trading links with the Venetian Republic and was on the front line of defence against the invading Ottoman Turks. "We think it was either made in Venice and brought here, or it may have been made locally," said Marin Curkovic, the director of a museum in the nearby town of Benkovac, where the cannon went on display



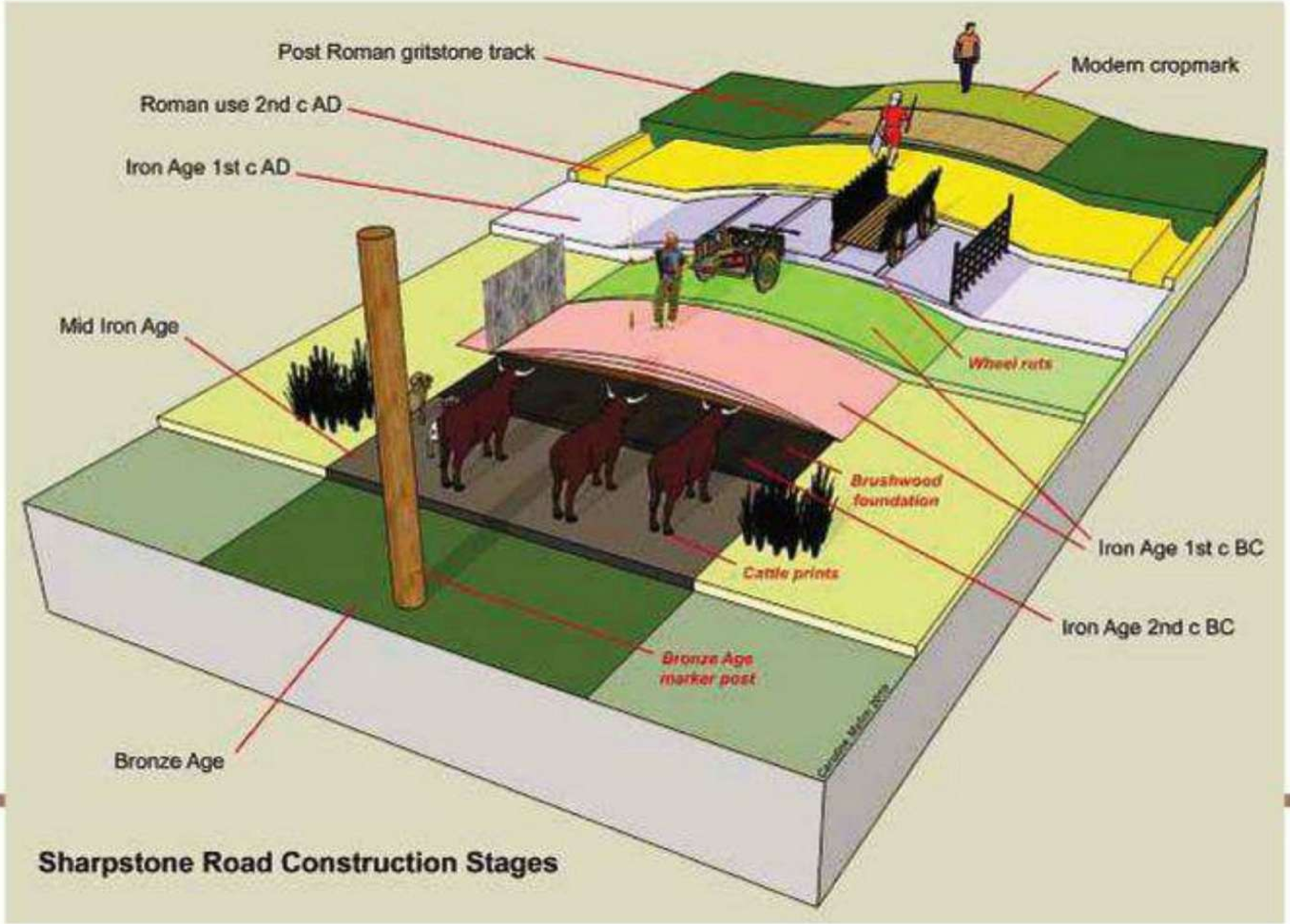
EUROPICS [CEN]

GO FOR YOUR GUNS

The Battle of Towton, fought during the Wars of the Roses on Palm Sunday, 29 March 1461, was the largest and bloodiest battle ever fought on English soil. More than 50,000 soldiers fought for 10 hours in a blizzard, killing around 28,000 men – one per cent of the English population at the time. Yorkist Edward IV displaced Lancastrian Henry VI as king, driving the latter into exile in Scotland.

A recent discovery from the battlefield, near Tadcaster in North Yorkshire, made by metal detectorist Simon Richardson, has shown that some of the earliest handguns were fired on this day, making it the first gun battle in British history. The find contradicts the idea that guns were only used in that period of history to attack castles. As well as the fragments of two gun barrels, a lead bullet with an iron core has been unearthed. Tim Sutherland, an archæologist from the University of York, said the bullet was the earliest one found in Europe. Neutron analysis showed that the castings of the two 4in (10cm) gun fragments were "incredibly poor" and the metal "full of bubbles", making the guns liable to explode when fired. The alloys of the two fragments were different, showing they were from different handguns.

"The manufacturing of firearms in that period was notoriously unreliable," said Mr Sutherland. They were more likely to kill the gunman rather than anything he was aiming at. Poor accuracy and difficulties in firing such guns made them of limited use on the battlefield itself, although the noise would certainly have scared the horses on both sides. (Over two centuries earlier, in 1259, the Song armies of China made the first known use of firearms propelling bullets; they fended off Mongol invaders with bullets shot from bamboo tubes.) *BBC News, 22 Nov; D.Mail, 26 Nov 2010.*



CAROLINE MALIM / JAMES REED PR

this June having been mislaid for many years. "We cannot say with 100 per cent certainty that it was built to Leonardo da Vinci's designs, but the resemblance to his sketches is remarkable." It is, however, in poor condition – not least because it is thought to have exploded when first fired. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 11 June 2011*.

BRITONS STREETS AHEAD

Archæologists have found Britain's oldest properly engineered road, overturning the long-held belief that this was a Roman innovation. Many of the country's A roads, regarded as Roman, could turn out to be basically British. The road was discovered in Bayston Hill quarry near Shrewsbury in Shropshire, owned appropriately enough by the Tarmac company, which was preparing to extract high-quality aggregate to surface Britain's modern roads.

The finely engineered, well-cambered and skilfully metalled highway, initially assumed to be Roman, was 5ft (1.5m) high and 20ft (6m) wide. A brushwood foundation made of elder was overlaid by a layer of silt, topped off with a durable surface of cobbles taken from the River Severn. It was regularly maintained and resurfaced at least twice. A kerb system, kept in place by timber uprights, prevented it from slumping. Carbon-dating and OSL (optically stimulated luminescence) dating of brushwood and sediment showed the road was built in several phases, the latest of which was in the century before Roman legions invaded in AD 43. "It's a very exciting discovery," said Tim Malim, co-director of the excavation. "A road like this has never been identified before."

The archæologists suspect it may have been 40 miles (64km) long; so far, they have found two sections totalling 1,300ft (400m), but their alignment suggests that it connected two key political centres of the Iron Age tribal kingdom of the Cornovii – the Wrekin hill fort (the Cornovian "capital") near modern Telford – and Old Oswestry hill fort, near the modern border town of Oswestry. In its final phase, deep ruts suggest an increase in heavy traffic and Tim Malim speculates that farm produce was being moved from the Midlands into Wales, with perhaps minerals being transported the other way. Before it was properly engineered, the road is thought to have been a livestock droveway dating back to the Bronze Age. Large quantities of ancient animal dung and dung beetles support this hypothesis. *Independent, 12 Mar; Guardian, Western Mail, 16 Mar 2011*.

FACING, CENTRE: What could be the only triple-barrelled cannon, found in Croatia – it may even have been designed by Leonardo.

FACING, BOTTOM: A reconstruction of the different levels of the road discovered at Bayston Hill quarry in Shropshire.

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

141. I LOVE LUCIAN

(But not Lucy – American readers will understand)

Steve Moore's splendid article [**FT276: 46–51**] is my cue to offer more on Lucian (below), the author whom Lord Macaulay dubbed "The Voltaire of Antiquity" and Samuel Bristoe in his 1711 English translation as "The Darling Pleasure of Men of sense in every Nation".

The Suda, a Byzantine dictionary-cum-encyclopædia (c. AD 1000; cf. my "Aspects of The Suda", *Byzantion* 86, 2006, pp11–31) obituarises thus:

"Lucian of Samosata, nicknamed blasphemer or slanderer, or rather godless, because in his dialogues he ridiculed everything to do with divinity. Early in his career, this fellow was a lawyer in Syrian Antioch, but, after failing in this, he turned to writing and churned out reams of stuff. It is said that he was killed by dogs, because he aimed his savage pen at The Truth, for in his 'Life of Peregrinus' he attacked Christianity and slandered Christ himself, the scum. Consequently, he paid an appropriate penalty for his ranting in this life, but in the life to come he will inherit with Satan a share of the Everlasting Fire" – early example of the killer review.

Being a dogs' dinner was also the alleged fate of another irreverent Greek, the tragedian Euripides, noted with fortean details of the fates of Aeschylus and Sappho by Virginia Woolf in her essay "On Not Knowing Greek".

Various Byzantine commentators amassed a total of 39 scurrilous epithets against him (cf. my "The Scholiasts' Lucian", *Helikon* 20/21, 1980/81, pp219–34, for complete inventory and references), ranging from 'atheist' to 'boy-buggerer' to 'the thrice-accursed', this last frequently used of the ancient Greeks and others by Fort himself (e.g. *Books*, pp55, 151).

His supposed blasphemies earned Lucian a place on the Catholic *Index of Forbidden Books*, also evoking a Jesuit opera Lucianus Samosatenus Infelix Atheus, produced on 3 September 1766 at Regensburg by the Lyceum und Gymnasium Societatis Jesu – there's a copy in the British Library.

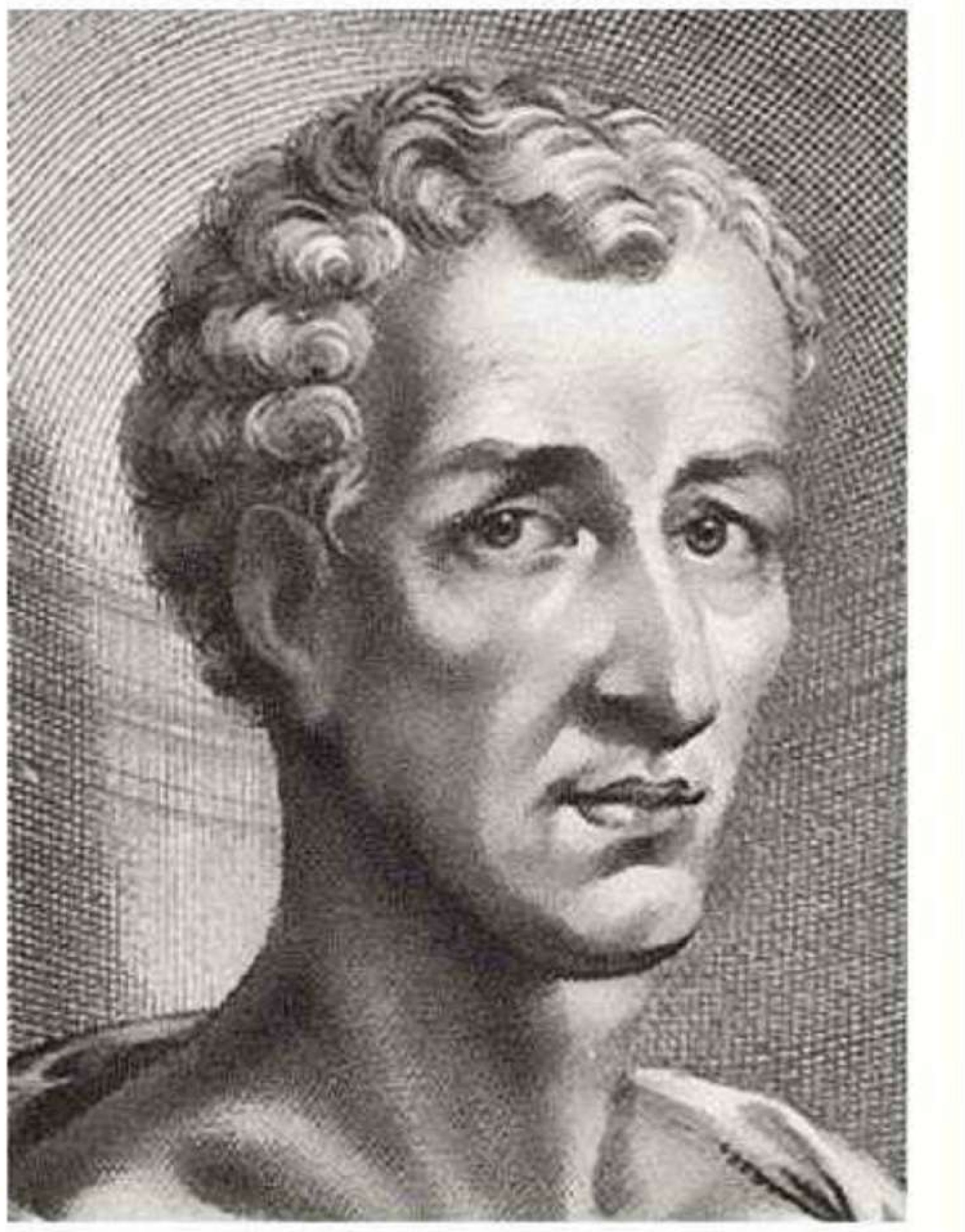
An image problem, then, in pious quarters. Mainly because of his pamphlet (comparable in viciousness to the Alexander) aimed at Peregrinus Proteus. This worthy (cf. my *Studies in Lucian*, Toronto, 1973, passim), after a career in adultery, boy-fucking, strangling his sexagenarian father "for living too long" – shades of the Stones' "What a drag it is, getting old" in "Mother's Little Helper" – fomenting Greek anti-Roman uprisings, exposing his cock Diogenes-style to a crowd (penis mightier than the sword?), and other sundry activities, he with maximum advance publicity burned himself alive as a postlude to the AD 165 Olympic Games – something like that would much enliven our modern ones, though not sure how you'd decide the winner.

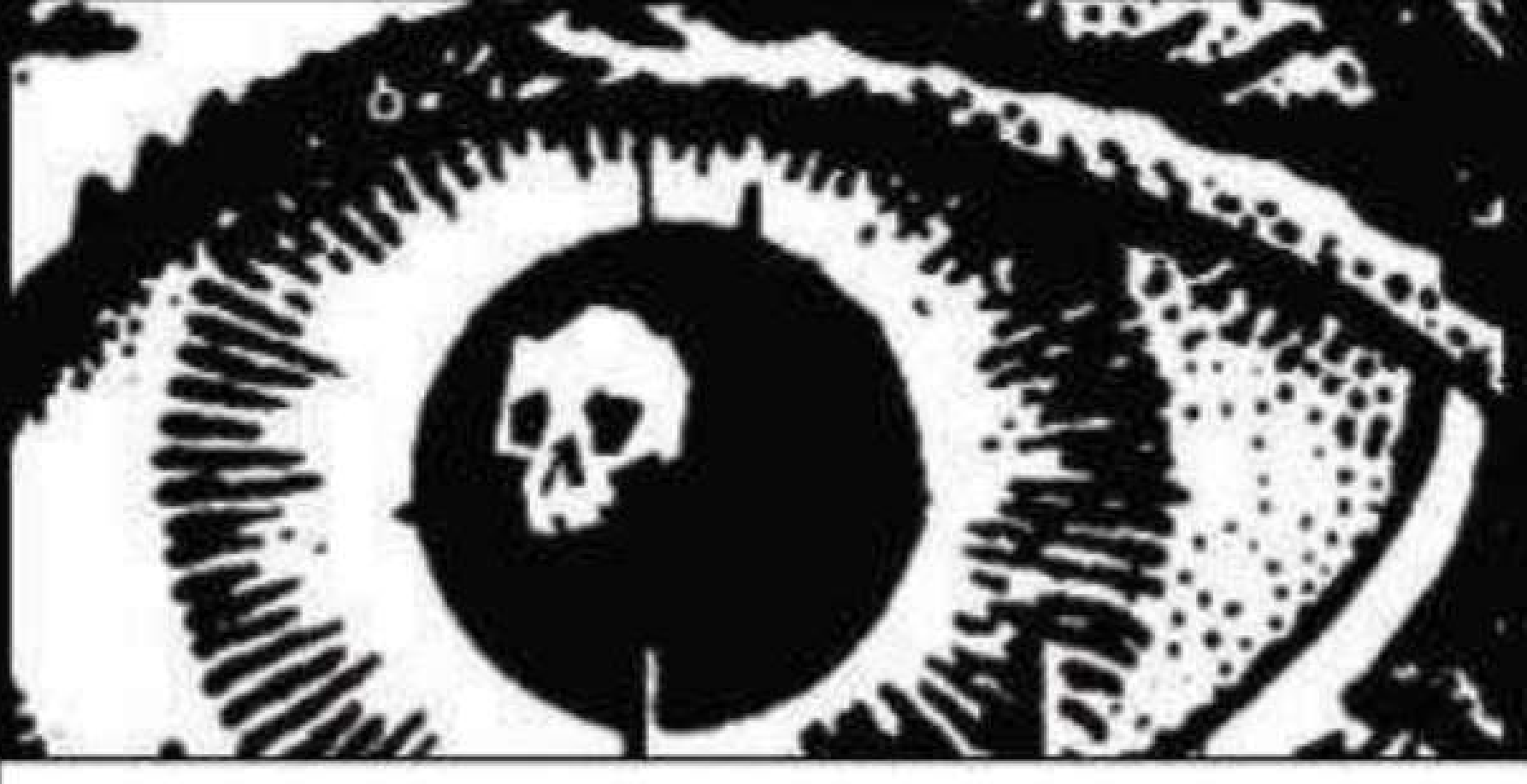
Lucian devotes most space to Peregrinus's duping of Christians – he is intriguingly said to have written some of their books – a sect mocked for worshipping "a sophist crucified in Palestine" (one pagan evidence for Jesus's historicity; cf. **FT228:25**) and as "morons who think they'll live for ever".

In his *Philopseudes* (Lover of Lies), Lucian pokes fun at tales of ghosts, poltergeists, and post-death experiences. This is satire, but satire aimed at contemporary beliefs and claims, some of which might have appeared in Rome's daily news gazette, the *Acta Diurna*, known to have carried tabloid sensations; cf. my article in *Chiron* 9, 1979, pp189–203, plus forthcoming *FT* column. One of his anecdotes herein is the direct ancestor of Faust's *Der Zauberlehring* and thence to Disney's *Fantasia*.

His True Story, albeit in Baron Munchausen vein, is an early, perhaps the earliest, science fiction novel – cf. my "Ancient SF?" [**FT278:45–47**] – along with philosophical dialogues which have his Cynic hero Menippus variously descending to Hades and ascending to Olympian heaven – latter not the medal-winners' podium.

And, if by now I've put you to sleep, there's an alarming awakener in his unique mention (*Hippias, or the Bath*, ch8) of a water-clock "that bellows like a bull" – I'll stick to my retro Teasmade, while working out the Greek for 'Wakey-Wakey!'





MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE wonders why dowsing equipment has taken such a hold on ghost-hunters.

GRIMSBY TELEGRAPH

As anyone with a passing interest in the pursuit of ghosts will know, the ghost-hunter of the last 60 years has tended to go armed with a barrage of technical equipment and gadgetry. For example, here's a report about members of the Paranormal Research Organisation staking out an old Cornish Manor House in 2008: "They will use an array of hi-tech equipment including night shot video cameras, laser thermometers, dowsing rods and pendulums, digital voice recorders, motion detectors, negative ion detectors, ultra-sound devices and digital cameras" (*Western Morning News*, 25 Jan 2008).

Amongst this impressive array of equipment, two items stand out like witchdoctors' wands on an NHS ward – pendulums and divining rods. Yet their inclusion in a ghost-hunter's kit bag is far from unusual. Many, if not the majority, of the UK's psychic investigation groups, entertainment companies and spiritual development circles who carry on ghost-hunting will deploy them. Many sincerely believe divining rods and pendulums may be used for spirit detection and communication, readily identifying gyrations and movements as proof of contact.

Nor is it just believers who are impressed. Take the case of Selina Maycock, a reporter for the *Grimsby Telegraph* who encountered "a strange force" while using dowsing rods at the reputedly haunted Skipworth Arms in Moortown, Lincolnshire. Strange incidents have included a pint glass exploding, the sensation of being seized by the arm, noises and the apparition of "a little lad or lass in a baby walker".

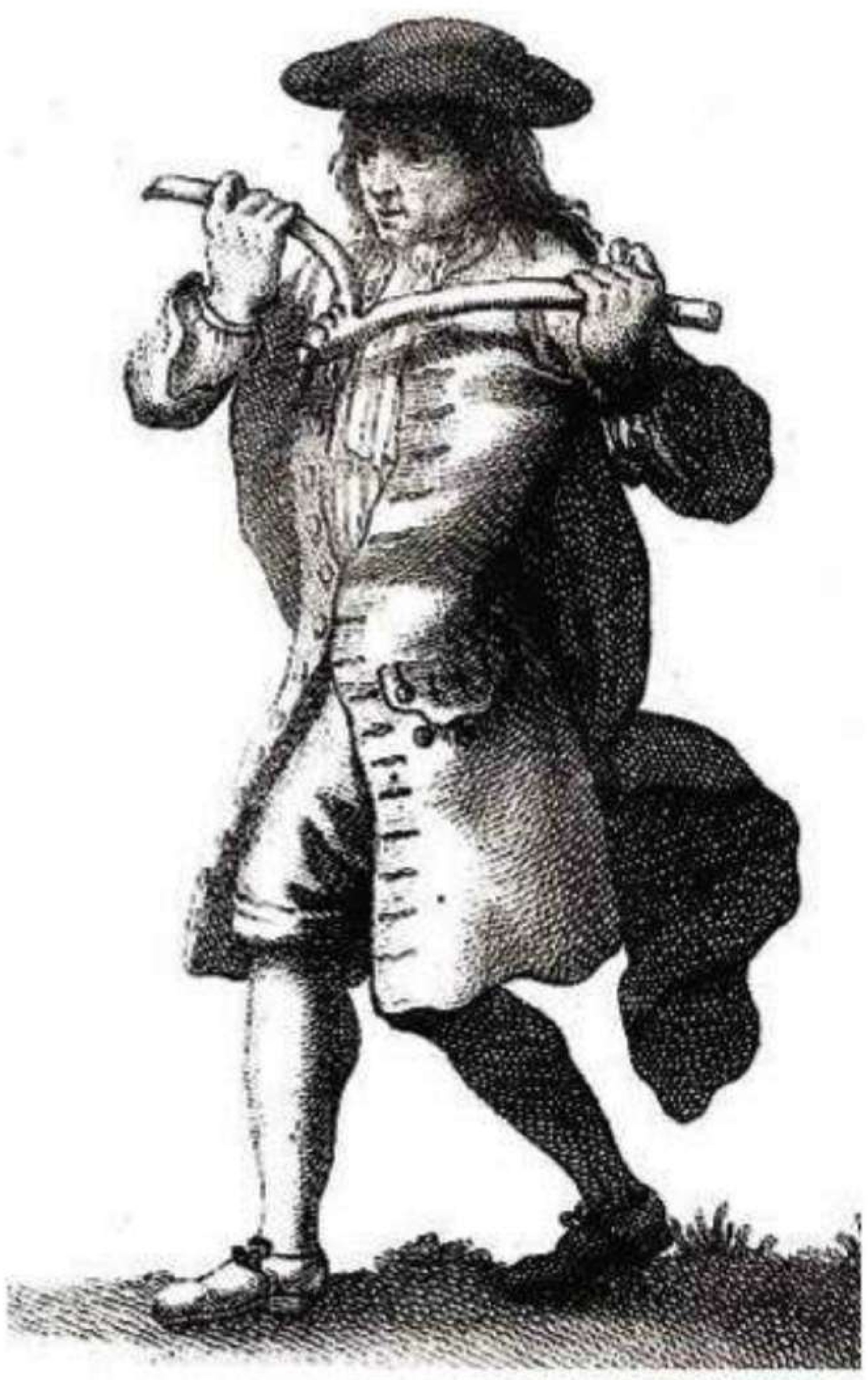
Accompanied by two members of 'Night Owls Paranormal Investigations' (Sue Drury, a medium, and Steve Dinsdale, described as an "audio-video researcher"), Ms Maycock was keen to try divining for herself. The NOPI team had previously held five vigils inside the pub, claiming to have variously contacted a deceased friend of the pub's landlady, an entity called "Jimmy" believed to be a former landlord, and a third presence, a boy going by the name of "Billy". Taking up the divining rods, Ms Maycock admitted to scepticism, but her disbelief evaporated with what happened next.

"Jimmy was asked to use the rods to point to where he was in the room and with that instruction, my heart almost leapt into my mouth. The rods swung round from pointing forward to touching my shoulders facing behind my back. But they didn't stop there. They continued until they crossed my neck in a headlock. At that point, I could sense something behind me and was in no doubt the spirit had moved the rods."

The experiment continued with the astonished Ms Maycock asking for 'Billy' to make himself known. In response, the rods crossed.

"My arms were a good 30cm [1ft] apart, so I knew I wasn't crossing them. But the motion was a softer one, as you would expect for a young child." She then tried to cross the rods but found she could not because of a "strange force" keeping them apart. Ms Maycock states her scepticism was duly shaken (*Grimsby Telegraph*, 13 Sept 2010).

> **"At that point, I was in no doubt the spirit had moved the rods"**



ABOVE & FACING PAGE: Dowsing to detect ghosts at the Skipworth Arms in Moortown, Lincolnshire. **BELOW:** A traditional water-dowser.

But was this really evidence of a ghost or spirit being present? Divining and dowsing for water and other substances is a huge area, but anyone with the slightest knowledge understands that such movements are not those of the rods themselves; they do not move "of their own accord". There is no intrinsic detecting power within a rod or pendulum to move it – in every case it needs to be held by a living being to show any reaction. A wide variety of instruments have been made or adapted for use by dowsers, including the traditional forked twigs (hazel, willow or peach), coat hangers, whalebones, copper wires, walking sticks, pitchforks, bakelite strips, surgical scissors and even – it has been claimed – a German sausage. Some of the best dowsers dispense with any prop, working with their hands alone.

Personally, I think there is a lot of interesting evidence for a dowsing ability that detects water and probably other material substances. Intriguing results occur even under the basilisk glare of arch-sceptics such as James Randi on televised showdowns

(Editions of *Arthur C. Clarke's World of Strange Powers*, Yorkshire TV, 1985, and "James Randi Psychic Investigator" on Channel 4, 1991). But whereas dowsing for water, a mineral deposit or a dead body is open to verification (you either find it or you don't), there is no way of objectively confirming any claim by a psychic or medium that says a ghost is moving a dowsing rod. Unfortunately, there is no settled opinion on how pendulums and rods behave ("For each dowsing aid there are as many different ways of holding it and interpreting the way it moves" – Lyall Watson: *Supernature*, 1973).

Beliefs that pendulums and rods can be used for contacting the spirit world are not founded upon any controlled and reported experiments (despite many ghost-hunting groups claiming to be "scientific"). While mediums have long used planchettes and Ouija boards to supposedly contact spirits (or the subconscious mind, depending on your point of view), dowsing to talk with the dead is a modern notion.

A rare critic of divining rods as ghost-detectors is John Fraser in his *Ghost Hunting*: *A Survivor's Guide* (2010). His view is that at worst, movements are caused by no more than unconscious muscular action by anyone holding the rod or pendulum, interpreted as signals from the beyond, a view encouraged by the organisers of events who are either principally concerned with entertainment, making money, or confirming pre-existing beliefs. At best – assuming some dowsing ability is operating – twitches by the rod or swings of the pendulum are still being generated by muscular actions, as a subconscious reaction to any manner of things present. Even presuming that movements are a response to a ghost, how would one distinguish this from the reaction to water? Most buildings will have running water or a supply of electricity somewhere, so is it not possible these may be the cause?

Next time, I shall suggest how the notion of dowsing for ghosts has arisen.

GRIMSBY TELEGRAPH

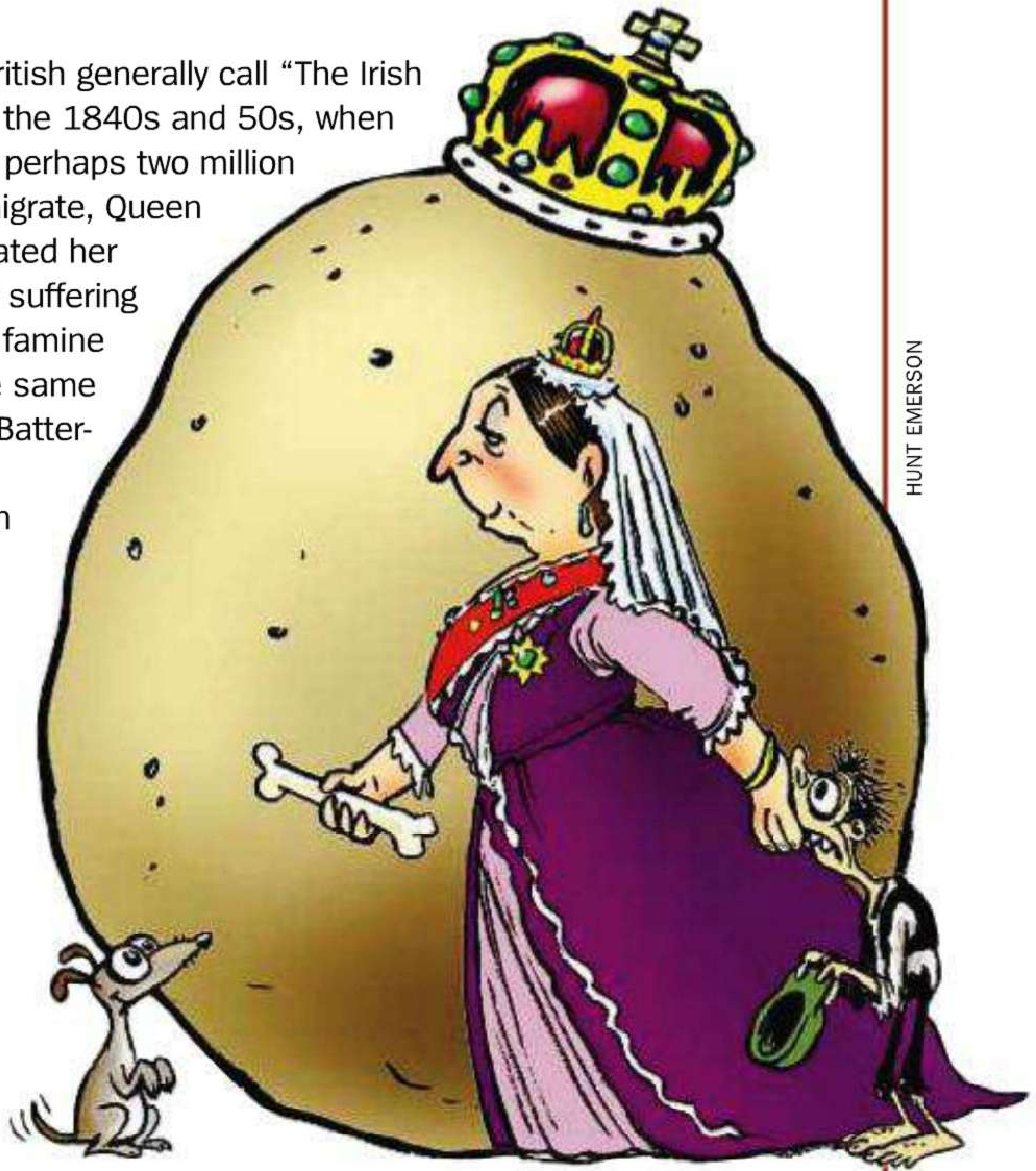
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

145. QUEEN VICTORIA AND THE GREAT HUNGER

The myth

During what the British generally call "The Irish Potato Famine" of the 1840s and 50s, when a million died and perhaps two million were forced to emigrate, Queen Victoria demonstrated her contempt for their suffering by donating £5 to famine relief – and on the same day giving £10 to Battersea Dogs' Home. Almost unknown in Britain, this story is widely believed in Ireland, and amongst the Irish diaspora.



HUNT EMERSON

The "truth"

Battersea Dogs' Home was founded in 1860, so that seems to deal with that aspect of the tale. Whether the Queen was a supporter of earlier canine charities I don't know – but what is certain is that she was the world's largest single donor to Irish famine relief, giving £2,000 in January 1847. In March that year, she sent out a Queen's Letter calling for donations, which raised the enormous sum of £170,571. Significantly, a second Letter, in October, brought in just £30,167. The Queen's more sympathetic view had by now lost out to elements in the Establishment which saw the need to defend the laissez-faire principle of non-intervention at any cost, and to moralists who argued that famine was God's way of teaching the Irish to be less "feckless".

Sources

http://bit.ly/qYu9Ct (multitext.ucc.ie); http://bbc.in/Y1U1l (BBC); http://bit.ly/p9G5GF (battersea.org.uk)

Disclaimer

The continuing debate amongst historians over whether the starvation in Ireland was the product of a natural disaster or of free-market economic policies (or both) is clearly beyond the remit of this column. On the specific issue of Vicky's charitableness, readers are as ever invited to correct errors or add new information, via the letters' pages.

Mythchaser

Hit TV shows in the US have long boasted of causing a temporary strain in the nation's water supply, when millions of viewers flush their lavatories simultaneously during commercial breaks. But is this a genuine measure of ratings success, or just a myth?

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

FURTHER DETAILS ON STORIES PREVIOUSLY REPORTED IN *FT*

ODD COLLECTORS [FT277:24–25]

Forteantimes
ALIEN INVASION

Barmaid Anne Langton (right), 58, shares her home in Somercotes, Derbyshire, with 16,620 model pigs. Her collection includes stuffed toys, china statues, piggy banks and a pig clock in every room. It all began when her husband John bought her a pig-themed pot when they were 17 and dating. "We go round the car boot sales picking them up," she said. "Most only cost a few pounds, but over the years I must have spent thousands."

On 23 June, the Spanish town of Ciudad Rodrigo mourned the death of the proprietor of the world's largest collection of chamber pots. Jose Maria del Arco's museum, which attracted hundreds of visitors a week, displayed 1,322 potties from 27 different countries and had 1,500 in reserve. Meanwhile in Belgium, Tony Guens, 52, has amassed 240,000 business cards at his home in Leopoldsburg, including one from the Sultan of Brunei.

As a boy, Jack Copp, 24, from Wiltshire, was terrified of vacuum cleaners; but after overcoming his phobia by opening one up and seeing how it worked, he began collecting them. He now has 120 and has landed his dream job – with Dyson, home of the bagless vacuum. *Sun, 1 June; Metro, 30 June, 5 July; Sunday Telegraph, 26 June 2011.*

VEXING HEXES [FT256:10–11]

Forteantimes
The Devil Rides Out

The legend of stones taken from Blarney Castle apparently bringing bad luck continued with an "unholy" rock returned from the US in June. Linda Kelly, an estate agent from South Carolina who organised the sale of contents from the home of a retired priest, bought the rock at the sale for one dollar, despite finding the house "creepy" and vowing not to buy anything. The priest, a former schoolteacher, had lived a "sad life" and had shut himself off from the world, according to Ms Kelly. "The man's house was filled with religious items," she said. "It was a time capsule of stuff from the early 1900s until the 1970s." She bought the rock on impulse to send to her daughter, who is working in Ireland, but once it was in her possession, her luck took a dramatic turn.

CATERS NEWS / RACHEL ADAMS

"First off, my work dried up for a couple of weeks. Then I had a few days where I felt really depressed, for no reason. I felt so low I couldn't even leave the house. Totally unlike me," she said. She then received notice that a bill payment she had posted weeks before had never arrived. "After that, I scooped up the rock and drove it straight to the post office. I was a little worried to drive with that rock in the car. When I finally passed it over to the postal clerk, I did feel a sense of relief." It had been in her possession for three weeks. Staff at Blarney Castle, Co. Cork, Ireland, confirmed they had received the rock from Ms Kelly. "It's all buried in mythology and folklore and that speaks for itself," said Blarney Castle owner Sir Charles Colthurst.

An old carved stone head which mysteriously reappeared a decade after going missing from Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly, Ireland, had brought bad luck to those who took it, according to an informant who contacted Tom Moore, the manager of the Clonmacnoise visitor centre. Possibly a depiction of St Ciarán, the head was one of four artefacts surrounding St Ciarán's Well. It was used as a station for pilgrims who traditionally worship there in September on Pattern Day. The head disappeared in 1998, when the well was still privately owned. Its whereabouts remained unknown until last March, when Mr Moore received a phone call from a local pub. The caller put him in touch with a go-between who told him the piece had been returned to the well earlier that day. "He was a bit worried someone else might take it," said Mr Moore.

The man claimed the head was found in a field about 50m (164ft) from the site and was taken away for safekeeping. Those who took it were unaware of the connection to the well, but "they had awful bad luck from the time they took it", according to the informant. Archæologists believe the head may date to the 17th or 18th century. It is part of a larger bust with the words "Do Penance" inscribed in Irish on its base. "Maybe the people who carved this stone… said it was St Ciarán," said Mr Moore, adding: "It's more Buddha-like than Christian." *Irish Independent, 18 June; Irish Times, 20+22 June 2011.*

WOMB RAIDERS [FT256:27]

On 13 April, Kathy Michelle Coy, 33, told Jamie Stice, her 21-year-old pregnant "friend", they were going shopping for baby clothes but instead took her to a wooded area off a dirt road near Bowling Green, Kentucky, and knocked her out with a stun gun. She then slit her throat and wrists and cut the baby out of her abdomen. Coy was arrested after showing up at a Bowling Green hospital with a newborn baby boy, along with a uterus, ovaries and placenta. A medical examination showed no signs that she had given birth. Initially, Coy insisted she was the boy's mother, then told police she had bought him for $550 from a woman named "Ashley", but the next day she led investigators to Stice's body. James Reynolds, the baby's father, said the child was in good condition and that his name was Isaiah. He declined further comment.

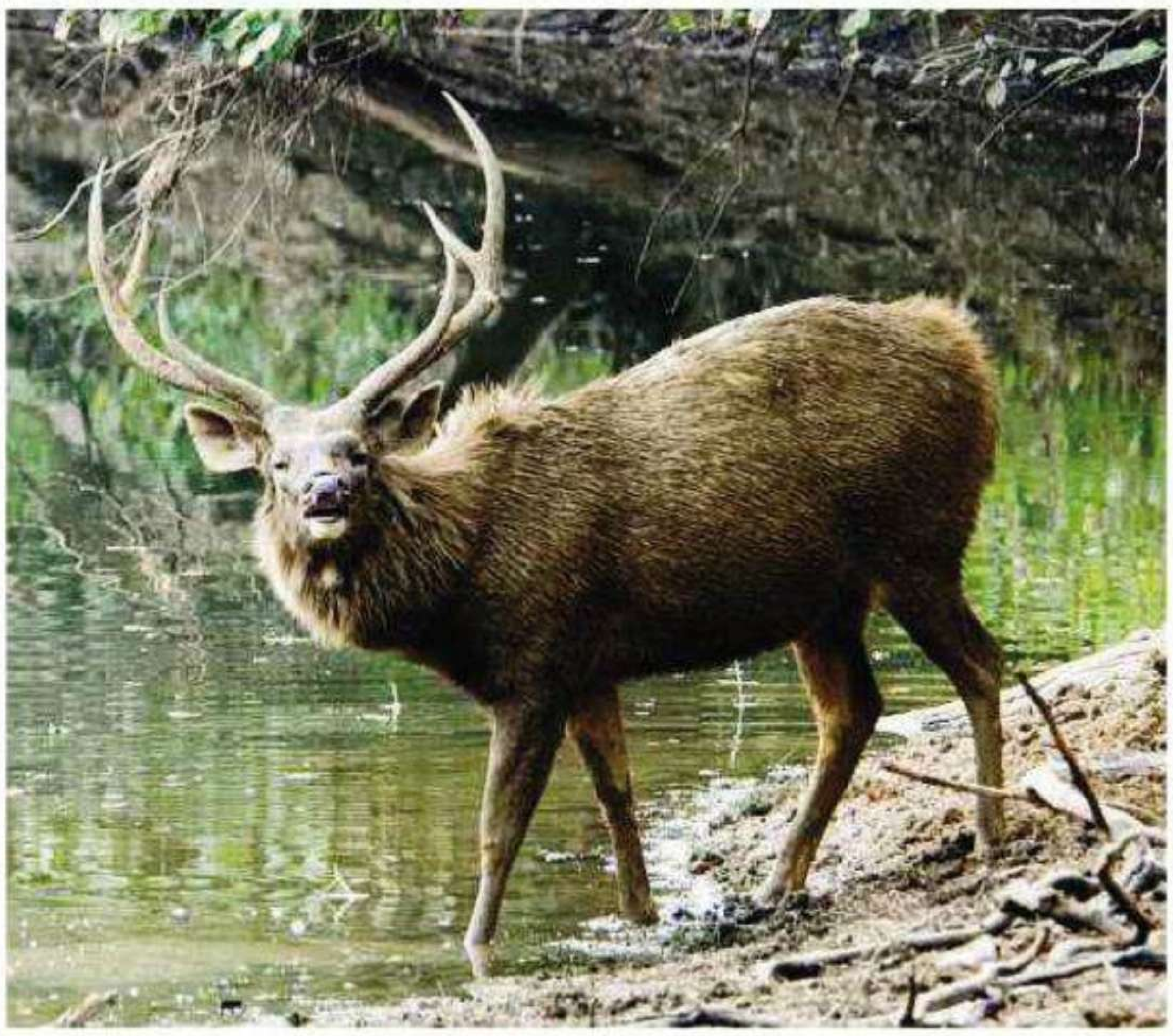
This is the 16th fœtus theft that has come to *FT*'s attention since 1987, all but two occurring in the US. Leung Sin-ting, 27, was jailed for 10 years in Hong Kong in May 2010 for the manslaughter of an unborn baby she tried to extract from the abdomen of "Ms Lee". Lee survived but her child didn't. Karina Roberts, from Portand, Oregon, who cut a baby out of Heather Snively's womb in June 2009 [**FT252:17**], was jailed for life without parole in October 2010. *MX News (Sydney), 11 May; [AP] 8 Oct 2010, 19 April 2011.*

MICROWAVE MURDERERS [FT252:27]

Ka Yang, a 29-year-old woman from Sacramento, California, stands accused of fatally microwaving her baby daughter Mirabelle Thao-Lo, aged one week, six weeks, or six months (reports differ). The child was found dead on 17 March this year, after a male relative called police. Yang was charged with murder on 21 June after experts identified "thermal injuries" on the child's body. Yang told detectives she suffered a seizure while holding the child as she worked at her computer and woke up on the floor. She later claimed she might have a split personality. Police officers Laura Peck said: "There have been only three other documented cases in the entire country where the injuries were consistent with this case." She said detectives didn't know of a motive for the alleged killing. Yang has three other children, all aged under seven, who are now with relatives. Curiously, two of the earlier baby-cookers, Elizabeth Reneé Otte and Annet Tol [**FT133:27, 146:27**] were epileptics who allegedly committed the atrocities in a state of somnolence. *[R] 21 June; Sun, 23 June; Metro, 24 June 2011.*

ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden



LEFT: A sambar deer.

BELOW: The author with a life-size reconstruction of a dire wolf.

PAUL ASMAN & JILL LENOBLE / CC ATTRIBUTION 2.0

BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE IN INDIA

Although the Centre for Fortean Zoology's Indian cryptozoological expedition of November 2010 didn't find their intended quarry – a mysterious bipedal man-beast known as the mande-burung – it did encounter what appeared to be a gargantuan set of muntjac (barking deer) antlers mounted as a trophy in the home of a local hunter. Indeed, they were even bigger than those of the Vietnamese giant muntjac *Muntiacus vuquangensis*, the world's largest species, which itself was only discovered by science as recently as 1994 [**FT78:19**]. Not only did the team take photos of this potentially significant trophy, they also took DNA samples, which were sent to Copenhagen University zoologist Lars Thomas for comparative analysis in a bid to discover the deer's taxonomic identity.

Had a hitherto unknown, record-breaking species of gigantic muntjac been uncovered in India? The CFZ finally received the DNA results in mid-June 2011: the antlers were not from any form of muntjac, but instead from the much larger sambar deer *Rusa unicolor*, whose antlers when juvenile happen to resemble those of muntjacs. Although this finding was naturally disappointing, at least the case had been fully investigated scientifically, unlike so many other ostensibly important cryptozoological cases in the past, in which physical evidence had been encountered but never examined, then finally lost or destroyed. *http://bit.ly/r067Ky (forteanzoology.blogspot.com). 17 June 2011.*

NOT SO DIRE A PROPOSITION

Closely related but larger than today's grey wolf *Canis lupus*, the formidable North American dire wolf *C.dirus* is famous for the numerous specimens discovered in California's La Brea Tar Pits, but it had become extinct around 10,000 years ago. However, there is a remarkable ongoing project dedicated to achieving a dramatic dire wolf resurrection… of sorts. A fascinating breeding programme that has been attracting plenty of media attention lately is the Dire Wolf Project, launched by the National American Alsatian Breeder's Association, because it aims to recreate within a domestic breed of companion dog the basic dire wolf body, size, and bone structure. In short, not a true, genetically restored dire wolf, but rather a domestic dog that mirrors its phenotype (external morphology) as closely as possible.

The American Alsatian, first created in 1987 from matings between original Alsatians (German Shepherd Dogs) and Alaskan Malamutes and initially referred to as the North American Shepalute, is itself the first product of this selective breeding project. However, the project's continuing long-term plan is to refine its morphology still further, ever increasing its outward similarity to the genuine dire wolf, having subsequently introduced Anatolian Shepherd Dogs, English Mastiffs, and the Great Pyrenees into the breeding mix, because each of these possesses certain morphological attributes recalling those of the dire wolf. Conversely, no dogs with any recent *bona fide* lupine ancestry have been used, because the goal is to restore the dire wolf in looks only – breeding back the large, round bones, the massive feet, and the broad head found in the skeletal structure of dire wolves studied by American palæontologists – and *not* this wild prehistoric species's behaviour or exact genetic composition. *www.direwolfproject.com/ accessed 28 June 2011.*

DR KARL SHUKER

CRIMINAL CROPPERS

The latest batch of morons to fall foul of the law

ABOVE: CCTV cameras picked up a bungled attempt at a bombing a pub, when Amir Ali was engufed in flaming petrol then ran into a lamp-post.

Robbers had to flee empty-handed after using 10 times too much explosive to blow up a bank in the northeastern German village of Malliss. The Volksbank was reduced to a pile of rubble and its roof completely obliterated by the 2am explosion, while cars and buildings up to 100m (330ft) away were damaged. Even the thieves' low-loader getaway vehicle was left alight after shards of metal pierced the fuel tank, but no one was injured. Amid the wreckage, the cash machine and safes were left intact. "Something evidently didn't work the way the robbers wanted it to," said local police spokesman Niels Borgmann with masterful understatement. Police were still hunting for the culprits. *Guardian, Sun, 27 May; Metro, 28 May; Sunday Times, 30 May 2010.*

A complaint to police said the marijuana tasted "nasty"

On 28 May 2008, Amir Ali, 28, of Crouch End, north London, set out to bomb the Imperial Arms in Crawley, West Sussex. The plan was for Ali to throw two bricks through a glass door and then his accomplice would toss in a petrol bomb. However, the door failed to break and the petrol bomb bounced off it, engulfing Ali in flames. Singed but unhurt, he then tried to scarper, but was so blinded by the flash he ran straight into a lamppost. He fell flat on his back with his head split open in a farcical scene

CORNISH TSUNAMI

Freak waves pound the coast but full explanation is not clear

An underwater landslide on the Atlantic continental shelf 200 miles (320km) out to sea was the probable cause of a series of tsunami-like waves and tides off the coast of Cornwall on 27 June. Although the British Geological Survey said there was no seismic activity, the tide was seen to shift by up to 150ft (46m) in a matter of minutes. Soon afterwards, three-foot (90cm) bore waves surged up estuaries along the south coast. The effects were felt from Penzance to Portsmouth, 250 miles (400km) away.

"It was like something out of a horror film," said Simon Evans, 45, who was digging for bait on the beach at Marazion, Cornwall, at about 10.30am. "The weather was really foggy but extremely warm and close and the sea was as calm as a mill pond. One minute I was standing at the water's edge, then when I turned around the water had retreated around 50 yards [45m]. I had no idea what had caused it, but I didn't really want to hang about and find out... I jumped in my car and got out of there."

Bob Hunt, the National Trust's head guide for St Michael's Mount off the Cornish coast, said several day-trippers were caught out as they walked to the tourist attraction across the sand. "One minute they were happily walking across the walkway and the next they were knee-deep in water. It was bizarre... At one point, the sudden change was so strong there were two walls of water, with the eastern side around eight inches [20cm] higher than the other."

David Ladner, a boatman, added: "The funny thing was all the ladies' hair was standing on end with the static." This piezoelectric effect might have been caused by the squeezing of quartz crystals, which are present in the rocks in and around Cornwall, and/or the release of radon gas, large quantities of which are present in these rocks. On the other hand, oceanographer Simon Boxall, who was out at sea in a small boat off the coast of Falmouth when the 'mini-tsunami' struck, thinks it was a seiche, a freak wave that can be caused by an area of very low pressure crossing an area of water; this low pressure would also account for the static in the atmosphere.

Bob Brown was launching his dinghy at the mouth of the Yealm Estuary in Devon when he saw the wave. "The tide was coming in," he said. "All of a sudden, it stopped coming in from the sea and went back the other way. It came back at quite a force – all the boats were bobbing around." A local landowner said the first thing he noticed was "lots and lots of fish jumping out of the water". *D.Telegraph, Times, 30 June; D.Mail, 1 July; (Devon) Sunday Independent, 3 July 2011.*

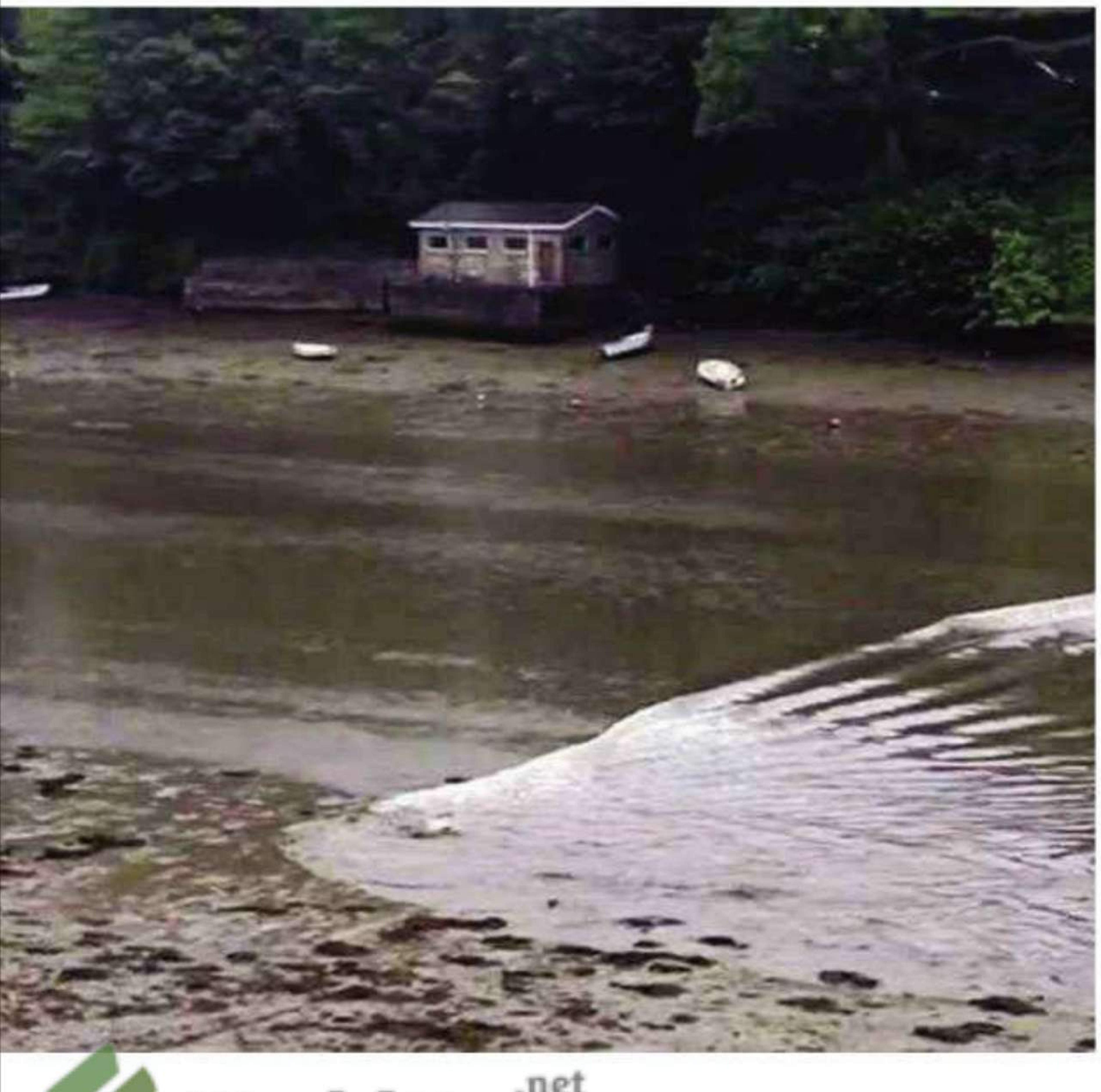
captured on CCTV – leaving the police in stitches. The pub landlord called 999 after being woken by the din. Ali was arrested after staggering into a nearby medical centre. When he came to trial for attempted arson in Hove on 7 December 2010, he pleaded not guilty, but was jailed for eight years. Ali and his unknown sidekick were said to be part of "a campaign of intimidation by local drug lords". *D.Mirror, Sun, Metro, 9 Dec 2010.*

Jonathan Ochola, 21, from Dagenham in Essex, helped his friend Rashad Delawala steal £500 in an armed raid on a Ladbrokes bookmakers in Portsmouth. He was the getaway driver and the pair split the takings. Police traced Delawala after he dropped a balaclava with his DNA on it. Officers visited Ochola, who claimed he was at home watching football with his brother at the time of the raid. They then looked in his diary. The entry for 12 June 2010 read: "Go Portsmouth / Robbery happens / Car breaks down in Kingston." *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 11 July 2011.*

Albert Bailey, 26, and a 16-year-old accomplice used a mobile phone to call People's United Bank in Fairfield, Connecticut, and threaten to create a "blood bath" if they weren't given a bag containing £65,000. When they arrived at the bank 10 minutes later, the police were waiting for them in the parking lot. Sgt James Perez said the two Bridgeport residents were, in his opinion, "not too bright". *Connecticut Post, 23 Mar 2010.*

Nichita Davis and Delaney Douglas were at home in Charlotte, North Carolina, when two men broke in and searched for valuables. They fled with some jewellery and a wallet. Police investigating found a black T-shirt printed with a mugshot of one of the robbers (as identified by the householders) and the slogan in capital letters: "Making money is my thang". It had apparently fallen out of the getaway car as they sped away. A quick arrest was expected. *dailymail.co.uk, 2 April 2011.*

A 21-year-old man called police in Pennsylvania to complain that the grass he had scored was "nasty" when he smoked it. Uniontown detective Donald Gmitter said a test determined the substance wasn't marijuana at all, but didn't identify it. The man faced a charge of possessing a counterfeit controlled substance. *[AP] 27 Oct 2010.*



SWNS

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

THE MEDIA'S LONG ROAD TO BILDERBERG

Another column about Bilderberg? Yes: not because there is some new revelation but because Bilderberg acts as a kind of test case for conflicting worldviews. For example, here's a recent version of the conspiracy theorists' view, by Bob Chapman, on the American left:

"Veteran reporter Jim Tucker's warning, provided to him by his routinely accurate inside sources, that the powerful Bilderberg Group was planning a gargantuan new war in the Middle East to outstrip anything taking place in Libya, is now moving forward." [1]

Ignoring the clunky writing – "Jim Tucker's warning… is now moving forward" – this is the view of Bilderberg as a supranational decision-making body found mostly on the political right. Jim Tucker, Chapman's source, has been the leading Bilderberg-hunter the past 20 years and more. But Tucker also worked for the now defunct, anti-semitic magazine *Spotlight*.

The problem with this view is that there is no evidence to support it. In fact, the evidence all points in another direction: that Bilderberg is simply a meeting place for members of the transatlantic business elites at which they can socialise, get some input from invited experts, take a look at some of the politicians they may have to deal with, and – maybe – arrive at a consensus in some areas.

A new book, the paperback edition of the first English-language academic study of the group,[2] articulates this consensus-forming view of Bilderberg. It quotes, mostly anonymously, many participants on what happens at the group's annual meetings: they talk, they walk; nothing is decided; but a certain groupthink is reinforced. These accounts confirm what we had already learned from the comments of previous political participants such as Paddy Ashdown and Denis Healey.

In a sense, we have come a long way since the first substantial article on the group appeared in the now defunct magazine *Verdict* in 1980. The *Guardian*, which rarely mentioned Bilderberg before 2000 – Google produces one reference in 1999 – now runs a blog mocking it during the week of its annual meeting.[3]

But it has taken so long to get here! Denis Healey wrote about Bilderberg in his memoir, published 22 years ago. Why, then, have the major media and the academic world been so reluctant to go near it? Chiefly, I'd suggest, because the interest in the subject by conspiracy theorists has contaminated it, making mainstream media and academics stay away for fear of damage to reputation and careers.

This kind of contamination is a powerful force in our political culture. I was privy to a really good example. In 1987, when the investigation of the allegations of MI5 plots against the Labour governments of Harold Wilson was at its peak, the late Humphry Berkeley, a maverick former Tory MP, tried to round up a posse of the great and the good to press publicly for a decent inquiry. He persuaded Ted Heath, Merlyn Rees and Roy Jenkins, the last two being former Home Secretaries, all of whom had reasons to distrust MI5, to sign up. Then-newly-elected MP Ken Livingstone devoted his parliamentary maiden speech – by long tradition always non-political – to the 'Wilson plots' and accused the late Airey Neave of being involved (he was, slightly.) Cue uproar and outrage. The next day, Berkeley's little cabal dissolved. There was no way that senior British parliamentary figures were going to be associated with Red Ken, whatever the issue.

NOTES

[1] http://bit.ly/qdqE7x (theglobalrealm.com).

[2] Ian K Richardson, Andrew P Kakabadse & Nada Kakabadse: *Bilderberg People: Elite power and consensus in world affairs*, Routledge, 2011.

[3] See for example http://bit.ly/pmRzxC (www.guardian.co.uk).

NECROLOG

We note the passing of a spiritual seeker, the Grateful Dead's acid guru and sound-man, plus a psychic astrologer with an uncanny knack for seeing what's coming soon

JOYCE COLLIN-SMITH

As a child, Joyce Collin-Smith often felt there was someone in the room with her: "Angels or fairies, or even people who had died, seemed sometimes to be 'just around'." However, she spent over 50 years exploring various esoteric sects without finding the True Way. She was born Joyce Hartley in 1919, into a family of journalists and writers. Her father was the editor of the *Oxford Mail*, and she became that paper's first female reporter. Aged 16, she read Rudolf Steiner's *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* and was seduced by his talk of "different levels of reality and different modes of consciousness". In her late teens, she attended a meeting addressed by Dr Frank Buchman, founder of the Oxford Group (later Moral Rearmament), an evangelical movement centred round the idea of "listening to God", but was later shocked to find the organisation kept personal files on devotees detailing their sins, divulged during confession. She wrote an exposé for the *Oxford Mail* that provoked a flood of correspondence.

During World War II, she served in the WAAF with a Polish bomber squadron and later worked transcribing bugged conversations of prominent German PoWs. After the war, she met Rodney Collin-Smith, better known as Rodney Collin, a leading disciple of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky and author of such works as *The Theory of Celestial Influence*, an attempt to unite astronomy, physics, chemistry, human physiology and world history within a theory that the planets rule different organs of the human body. Collin – whose brother, Derry, Joyce would marry – became her mentor, and in the early 1950s she travelled to Mexico to practise the Gurdjieff "work" at his commune in the suburbs of Mexico City. The teaching of both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky sprang from the insight that everyday human consciousness amounts to a form of sleep, and that with the right kind of effort, we can begin to wake up. On 3 May 1956, Collin died after falling from the tower of the cathedral in Cuzco, Peru. He was found in a position resembling the crucified Christ and there was speculation that he had attempted to follow rather too literally Ouspensky's teaching that it is important to "die consciously".

Back in England, Joyce moved on to Pak Subuh, the Indonesian who in the 1920s had founded an international spiritual movement called Subud and claimed to be a channel of *latihan kejiwaan* (spiritual energy) from a higher power. In 1956, when Subuh visited London, she experienced the "releasing" effect of *latihan*, but subsequently became disillusioned. In the early 1960s, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi [obit. **FT237:24**] initiated her into Transcendental Meditation. Feeling that she had finally found "a genuine master – a Guru", she spent about eight years with the Maharishi and also served as his driver; but she began to feel he was losing "his cleanness of intent" and becoming "rather ruthless" in the use of his spiritual power. The final straw was the arrival of the Beatles. Joyce then became an astrological consultant, Tarot reader, esoteric writer and spiritual teacher, and was a mentor to James Webb, the author of *The Occult Establishment* (1976), who committed suicide in 1980 [see Gary Lachman's article on him, **FT150:34–38**]. In 1988, Joyce wrote an autobiography, *Call No Man Master*. Other works include two novels and *The Pathless Land*, an exploration of esoteric experience "from Astrology to Zaphkiel".

Joyce Hartley, afterwards Collin-Smith, spiritual seeker, born Oxford 1919; died Nov 2010, aged 91.

OWSLEY STANLEY

Owsley "Bear" Stanley helped lay the foundation for the psychedelic era by producing more than a million doses of LSD in San Francisco's Bay Area, fuelling the celebrated "Summer of Love" in Haight-Ashbury. He was born Augustus Owsley Stanley III in Kentucky, a state governed from 1915 to 1919 by his namesake grandfather. In 1963, he enrolled in a ballet course at the University of California, Berkeley, lasting only a year. Before leaving, he discovered the recipe for LSD-25 in the *Journal of Organic Chemistry* in the university library. He started making it in his basement in Point Richmond (under the name White Lightning), and then on a larger scale in Orinda. LSD was outlawed in California in October 1966, and across the US two years later. Between 1965 and 1967, with the help of Melissa Cargill, his girlfriend and a qualified chemist, he made more than 1.25 million doses, of legendary high quality. Jimi Hendrix's song *Purple Haze* (1967) was reputedly inspired by a batch, and the group Blue Cheer took its name from another batch. He supplied Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters for events like the Muir Beach Acid Test (November 1965) and the Watts Acid Test (February 1966) – where he met the Grateful Dead. Around that time, the police raided his lab looking for methedrine. Since acid wasn't yet illegal, he successfully sued for the return of his equipment.

Having trained in electronics during a spell in the US Air Force, Owsley became the Grateful Dead's sound engineer, devising the first public address system specifically designed for music, and creating the group's Wall of Sound – a vast array of speakers used during concerts – that paved the way for huge festivals like Woodstock. His tape recordings of Dead concerts were turned into live albums. He claimed that his recording genius dated from a swimming accident that damaged his right ear when he was 19. "When stereo sounds good to me, it sounds fantastic to everyone else," he said. "And when it sounds fantastic to me, well, you wouldn't believe it." The Dead celebrated him in their song *Alice D. Millionaire*, a pun on a 1966 article in the *Los Angeles Times* headlined "LSD millionaire" (ironic, as he made no profit on his product). Steely Dan's 1976 single *Kid Charlemagne* was a musical portrait of the man they described as the "outlaw-acid-chef of the Sixties".

Busted for cannabis in Oakland in 1970, Owsley spent two years in jail. In the early 1980s, he emigrated to Queensland to avoid a new Ice Age that he expected to engulf the northern hemisphere. Down under, he established a business selling gold and enamel sculptures and maintained the all-meat and dairy diet he had followed since 1959. He is survived by his wife and four children, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

Augustus Owsley Stanley III, LSD cook and sound engineer, born Kentucky 19 Jan 1935; died in a road accident in Cairns, Queensland 13 Mar 2011, aged 76.

HENRIETTA LLEWELYN DAVIES

Henri Llewelyn Davis (as she called herself) was a cousin of Daphne du Maurier and a "psychic

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astrologer" with an impressive client list, including the writer Jeanette Winterson. She was an illegitimate daughter of Tom Hopkinson, editor of *Picture Post* and notorious as "Britain's most married man". After graduating from Oxford with a degree in English Literature, she worked for the publisher Hamish Hamilton before travelling to India to study astrology. For years, she wrote astrology columns for *Cosmopolitan*, *Woman's Own*, *TV Times* and other publications, while offering private consultations. One of her best pieces of advice was to tell a woman not to buy a house in California; it burned down two weeks later following an earthquake.

Henri experienced a growing awareness of her own psychic powers: "I could often hear voices, very clearly, telling me what to say to a client about their particular circumstances. I found that I could use the birth chart as a basic tool… but that the most extraordinary advice was just coming through. Over and over again, clients would tell me how right the advice had been. And I would suddenly know things I couldn't know in normal life."

Winterson claimed she never made an important decision without consulting Henri. "Not long after we met [in 1987]," she recalled, "Henri said to me, 'You really should give up karate'. I hadn't even told her I went to karate classes, but I took no notice, and promptly dislocated my shoulder that night." On another occasion, Henri advised her not to buy a house she had set her heart on; later a farmer obtained planning permission for six properties in the neighbouring field and the people who had bought the house sold at a loss.

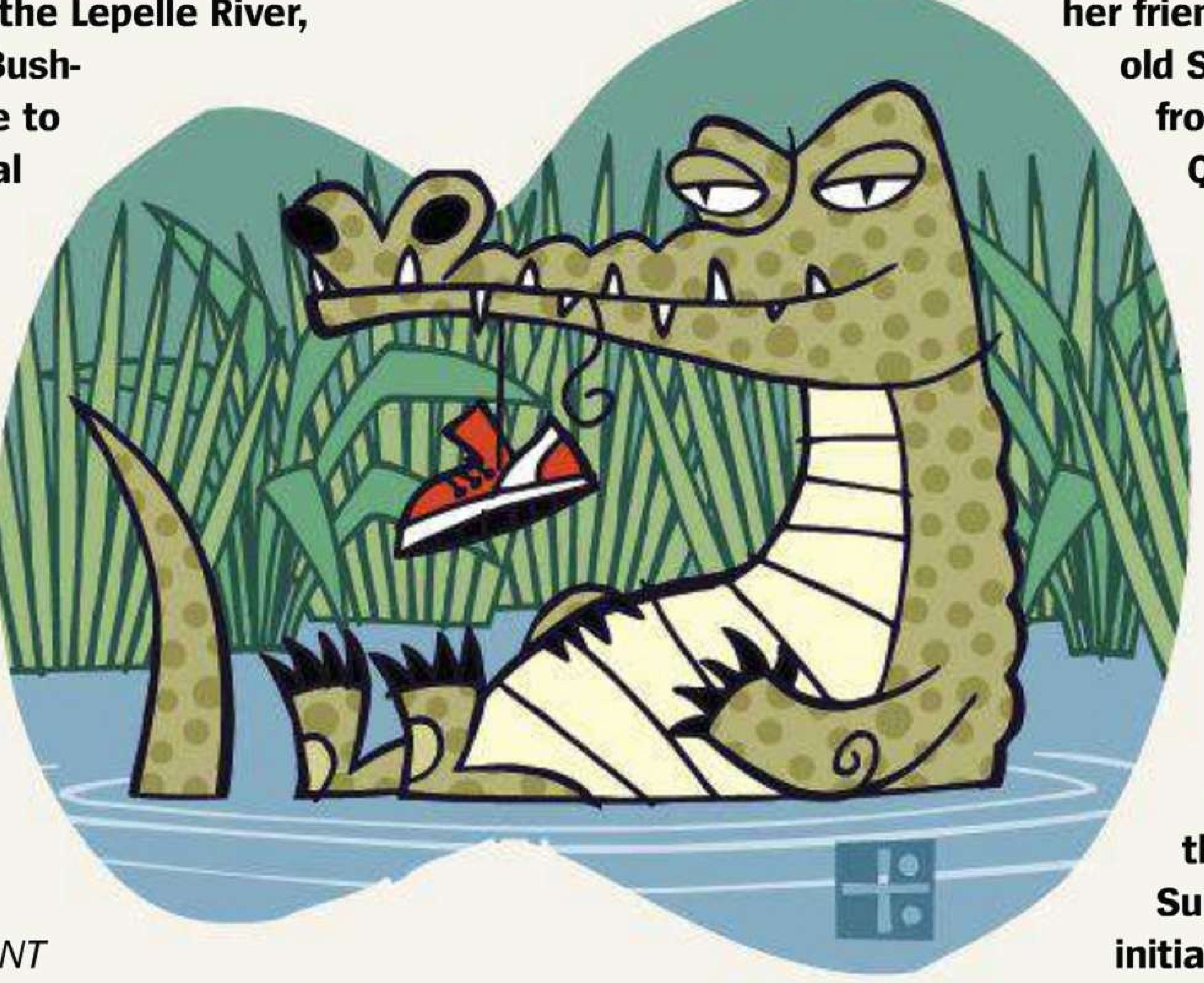
Henrietta Llewelyn Davies, astrologer, born London 12 Sept 1954; died 15 Mar 2011, aged 56.

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/strangedeaths

Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A FARM WORKER IN SOUTH AFRICA IS thought to have committed suicide by wading into a river full of crocodiles after a quarrel with his girlfriend – although his sister refused to believe he had taken his own life and said he must have been pushed in the water. David Lubisi, a 40-year-old father of three, had not been seen for more than a week after apparently telling a colleague on 7 April about his plan to wade into the Lepelle River, near the town of Bushbuckbridge – close to the Kruger National Park in the eastern Mpumalanga province. A human leg was seen in a crocodile's mouth four days after his disappearance. ***dailymail.co.uk, 18 April; Metro, Sun, 19 April 2011.***



TERRY COLON

OTECHESTVEN FRONT is a Bulgarian television show featuring people who have done extraordinary things, but after six of its guests met with strange deaths, bosses at Nova TV were considering cancelling the programme amid whisperings that it was cursed. The first victim – a brutal former crook identified only by his criminal nickname Marin "The Rose" – simply collapsed and died within days of appearing on the show in 2009. Another victim was "miracle mum" Ivanka Arsova, 62, who had a statue of the Virgin Mary that cried real tears. Two days after the show, a stranger appeared at her door and said God was "calling her". A local newspaper reported: "Within a week she had died of undiagnosed cancer. She had seemed perfectly healthy until then." Other victims include a disabled charity worker, a former prostitute and a drug addict who committed suicide on the way home from filming. The latest victim, herbalist Halil Baev, died in April this year when he rushed back into his burning house to save his black cat. "We are aware of what is being said about the show and we are looking into it," said a channel spokesman. "It might be that we need to change the format." *Metro, 4 May 2011.*

TWO CANADIANS DIED INSTANTLY ON 6 JUNE when a Pontiac Sunfire hit a 440lb (200kg) black bear and sent it flying straight through the windshield of an oncoming vehicle and out through the back window. The bizarre accident took place around 10pm on Highway 148 near Luskville, Quebec. The deceased were a 25-year-old Ottawa woman driving a Nissan Pathfinder SUV and her friend, 40-year-old Steven Leon from Gatineau, Quebec, who was sitting on the back seat. Only the woman's 28-year-old boyfriend, in the front passenger seat, survived. The two men in the Pontiac Sunfire that initially hit the bear were unharmed. The adolescent bear was killed. The incident led to the intriguing Reuters headline, FLYING BEAR KILLS TWO CANADIANS IN FREAK ACCIDENT.

While rare, the region has seen at least one similar wildlife accident. In September 1994, Tracy Gourlay, 29, from Kingston, Ontario, was killed near Prescott, Ontario, when a 150lb (70kg) deer that was struck by another vehicle smashed through the windshield of a car being driven by her husband. The deer, just like the black bear, continued through the rear window. ***Ottawa Citizen, 7 June 2011.***

ROY SULLIVAN, 74, COULDN'T STAND THE "screaming in his ears" from tinnitus and shot himself in the head. His wife Eileen found his body in the chicken shed at the bottom of their garden in Nazeing, Essex, when she returned from visiting their grandson on 30 January. Forteans may well recall another Roy Sullivan, a park ranger from Virginia famous for surviving seven lightning strikes, more than anyone else. He shot himself dead back in 1983 [**FT42:5**]. *D.Telegraph, 14 April 2011.*

the UFO files

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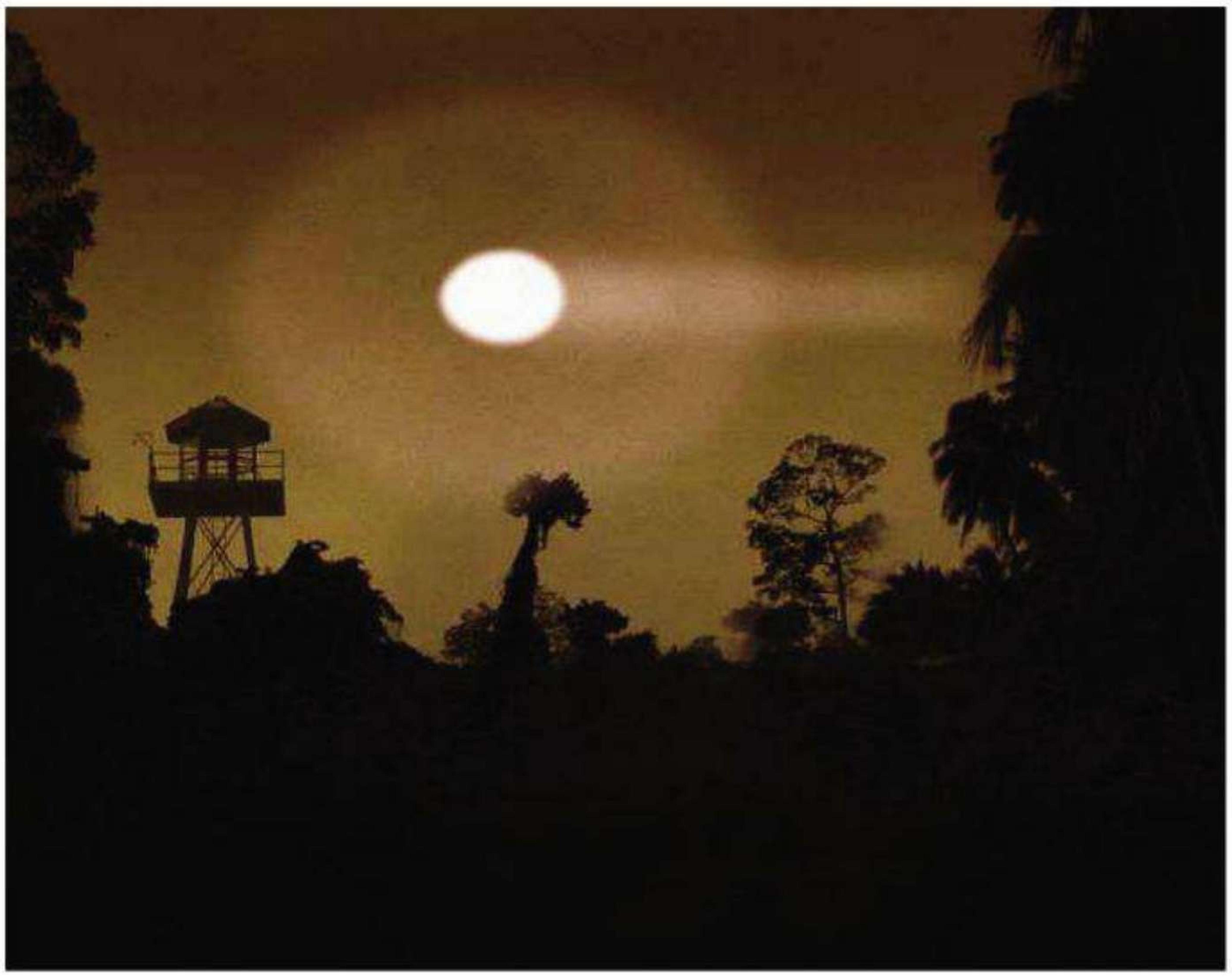
FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY



UFOS IN 'NAM

UFO reports from military memoirs and pilots' logbooks are rare specimens, but require careful interpretation. One such gem was discovered in a collection of US Army journals from the Vietnam War by archivist Joe Gillette of the US National Archives. He describes the 1969 entry in the daily journal of the 23 Infantry Division's Chu Lai Defense Command as more like "an episode of *The X-Files* than a war movie". The command defended territory in the Chu Lai Defense Sector on the Vietnamese coast, about 40 miles (64km) southeast of Da Nang. A network of observation towers ringed the base, with soldiers tasked to report any unusual or threatening activity. One report from the base journal, logged at 1.52am on 6 January 1969, describes a sighting made from Tower 72 of a glowing luminous object, 12–15ft (3.7–4.6m) in length, that flew into their sector and landed in the jungle. The log reads: "It is shaped like a big egg. Control tower reports their radar did not pick anything up. Object also does not seem to have any sound to it when it moves..." According to Gillette, the only follow-up action taken on this remarkable report was notification of the duty officer and no mention is made of it in subsequent journal entries. He suggests a number of explanations for the incident, including military operations and boredom, but dismisses them as unlikely, adding: "Drug use by soldiers, particularly in 1969, was a known problem in Vietnam. But two or more soldiers typically manned these towers. Assuming this was a drug-induced vision, it's difficult to imagine they each experienced the same hallucination, although if they were observing something they could not readily identify, one might have convinced the others they were seeing a UFO." So what did the soldiers see? One clue comes from a statement made in 1973 by Gen George S Brown, USAF Chief of Staff, who said unidentified objects were frequently reported during the conflict but they "weren't called UFOs. They were called enemy helicopters." http://bit.ly/qysFsz (blogs.archives.gov); http://tinyurl.com/44h7z5e (openminds.tv).

BERWYN MOUNTAINS UFO – NEW FILM!

In the best traditions of ufology, the Berwyn Mountain UFO events refuse to die. Although Andy Roberts's book *UFO Down* deconstructed the case and provided evidence to suggest there was neither a UFO crash nor an official cover-up, there are those who believe they have evidence to the contrary. Rich Hall (not the American comedian) is one of those, and he has spent two years researching and producing an independent documentary which, he states, will provide "compelling evidence that a well co-ordinated cover-up was orchestrated from the highest levels from day one". So far, so good, and Flyingsaucery applauds anyone who has the energy to delve into this complex case. But the name Rich Hall might ring a few bells with *FT* readers, for it was he who in 2008 'exposed' *FT* stalwarts Dr David Clarke, Andy Roberts, Mark Pilkington and John Lundberg, among others, as being MI5 operatives. We were, according to Hall, disinformation specialists working deep within British ufology to throw serious ufologists off the scent of the real aliens and UFO craft the government has known about for years. This hardly bodes well for anything produced by Hall, but there is worse to come. Hall "draws on years of dedicated research from investigators Margaret Fry and Scott Felton to piece together this until now unsolved mystery". Unfortunately, neither Fry nor Felton have added anything substantial to the Berwyn File other than unsubstantiated witness statements gathered decades after the event, failing to realise that contemporary documentary evidence is needed to support any claim of alien presences or cover-up. These cavils aside, Flyingsaucery awaits Hall's film with bated breath and will review it for *FT* when a copy appears. http://tinyurl.com/3rt3q3a (richplanet.net).

IS ANYONE WHO THEY SAY THEY ARE?

In the 1980s, a spate of well-documented UFO sightings took place in New York's Hudson Valley, resulting in a best-selling book, *Night Siege*, by Allen Hynek and Philip Imbrogno. Imbrogno, who has written several other books and is a well known US ufologist, has claimed a stint in US Special Forces, military service in Laos and academic credentials from the prestigious MIT. Now, former *UFO Magazine* editor Don Ecker has done a great deal of research into Imbrogno's claims and found no record of any Special Forces service or academic achievement at MIT. Does this devalue his UFO research? Well, it certainly doesn't do it any favours. But, true to form, some elements within ufology have begun to claim this is part of a smear job to detract from THE TRUTH uncovered by Imbrogno. In other words, you can do, say and claim what you want in ufology – because there will always be an apologist for your behaviour somewhere! http://bit.ly/qcS51A (theparacast.com).

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES EXAMINES MORE CASES OF UFOS AT SEA AND NOTES A CURIOUS PATTERN LINKING THEM ALL.

WHITE LIGHT, WHITE HEAT

Last month, I reported a sighting made aboard a commercial ship off the coast of Scotland in October 2010 (**FT278:29**). Upon investigation, links emerged with other cases, and I promised to look at some other intriguing UFO sightings made at sea.

One case (reconstruction shown at right) that was not reported in a UFO context interested me for reasons that will soon become apparent. It involved the tugboat *Good News*, bound from Puerto Rico to Fort Lauderdale in Florida one fine spring day in 1966 and towing a heavy barge filled with waste.

Captain Don Henry was called to the bridge to find they were losing power and systems were dying. He was told that before this happened the electrics had gone crazy, with dials spinning around as if amidst an electromagnetic field. Concerned about the cargo, Henry went on deck to check on the heavy metal lines that linked the tug to the fully laden barge and was amazed to discover that the weather had dramatically changed. Minutes earlier, the Sun had been shining in a blue sky. Now there was an odd milky grey/yellow hue above and the sky and sea blended into one with no sign of the horizon. Henry ordered full power to escape the strange 'weather'; the engines were throttled, but the boat would not move forward. Looking astern again, the captain now saw that a peculiar cloudy shape surrounded the barge and the taut towing line just disappeared into it. Moreover, where this mist hit the sea it was agitated – as if being disturbed by some powerful force. The captain yelled at his crew to give the *Good News* all the power they could muster, and after some minutes they regained control and, with a lurch, moved ahead as normal. The odd cloud had gone and the sky and sea had returned to their normal hues.

Two interesting sequels: when the crew went onto the barge to check their cargo was secure, they found all of its surfaces extremely hot to the touch. Also, they discovered that numerous flashlights on the ship now had dead batteries, seemingly drained of power.

Many things jump out from this report, not just its apparent location within the infamous Bermuda Triangle and its part in that particular legend. There's also the match with a number of UFO cases where weird glows have been alleged to generate strong electrical fields, power drains and sudden hot conditions.

One of the best comparisons comes from Barnard Castle, Co. Durham, on 6 June 1977. A motorcycling farm worker was riding on a wet night when he was suddenly swamped by a purplish hazy glow that hovered right over him. While the shape was on top of him, the witness reported two things: firstly, that the power had drained right out of his machine, as with the *Good News*. Then, as he felt his legs start to burn, he looked down and saw steam pouring off his leather jacket. In fact, the Durham biker later found that his leathers and cycle were bone dry and extremely hot to the touch. Again, pretty much exactly as the ship's crew had discovered after inspecting the barge.

The captain saw that a peculiar cloudy shape surrounded the barge

Clearly – whether you think of the curse of the Bermuda Triangle or a hovering spaceship – both these cases suggest similar forces, probably some kind of powerful atmospheric anomaly. But, causes aside, I think we are looking at one phenomenon reported in multiple contexts.

Indeed, while researching anomalies on the Isle of Man, I was intrigued by another shipboard episode. This involved the trawler *Ella Hewett*, four miles (6.4km) off Port Jack in the early hours of 29 November 1957. A 'carrot-like' object had suddenly appeared in the western sky and was seen by others on shore before 'detonating' without sound. Glowing 'white hot', this object passed right over the ship as the crew stared upward. Meanwhile, the vessel was bathed in a mysterious warm glow that had a strange effect on the paintwork. The crew reported that in the aura from the phenomenon the white paint vanished, leaving just the metal undercoat visible. Yet, by morning, a few hours later, it was back to normal and the crew were bemused as to whether they had witnessed an optical illusion or some temporary change produced by the energy field from the UFO.

Many years ago, an old mariner told me a story that will offer more obvious parallels. In October 1928, Bill was working on a large tanker crossing the Atlantic and heading for Miami (yes, Bermuda Triangle territory). After his shift, he walked to the library to do some reading, as he often did during these long voyages. But that night something was very different. The air was dead calm and he could hear no sound at all – neither the waves lapping against the hull nor distant voices from other members of the crew. It was very eerie. Becoming curious when nobody was inside the small library, he went back on deck to find that the ship was not moving. There was no engine sound and they were clearly becalmed. Then, just as the captain of the *Good News* would do nearly 40 years later, Bill looked over the rails to see if there was some kind of emergency that had led to the tanker stopping dead – only to find that the sky and the sea were blending into one grey mist without any trace of horizon. Concerned, he went in search of others. But the ship appeared deserted.

After some scared few minutes in which he feared the vessel had been abandoned, he finally saw one of his colleagues running towards him. Bill asked where they had been for the last few minutes, as he had circumnavigated the vessel and found nobody. His shipmate said that they had believed Bill had fallen overboard as he had, in fact, been missing for an hour and they had searched every inch of the ship more than once. Bill described what he had witnessed, but was accused of dreaming: out to sea there was fine weather exactly as, the man insisted, there had always been.

You might find this story hard to swallow, but when linked to the other cases reported above it suggests a pattern. And I remembered it when I met pilot Martin Caidin in the USA and he told me of his own experience on 11 June 1986 flying over the Atlantic, heading for the Florida coast as Bill had done 58 years earlier.

The plane had sophisticated navigation equipment, including direct live satellite imagery. This showed no cloud within 200 miles (320km) – except that, as he looked at the blue sea below, the aircraft wings were vanishing into what Martin called 'eggnog' – a creamy-yellow mass clinging to the aircraft. Meanwhile, the other crew, away from the windows, were shouting that the instruments had suddenly all gone crazy. Lights flashed, the gyroscopes and compasses were spinning wildly. They flew on as best they could, noting that the cloud was very unusual in that they could see the sky above and the sea underneath if they looked immediately above or below the aircraft. Then, suddenly, they emerged into daylight and, despite turning around to view the weird weather phenomenon from outside, could see nothing other than clear blue sky all around them.

Luckily, the crew of the commercial vessel off Scotland in October 2010 were not to face such a harrowing ordeal.

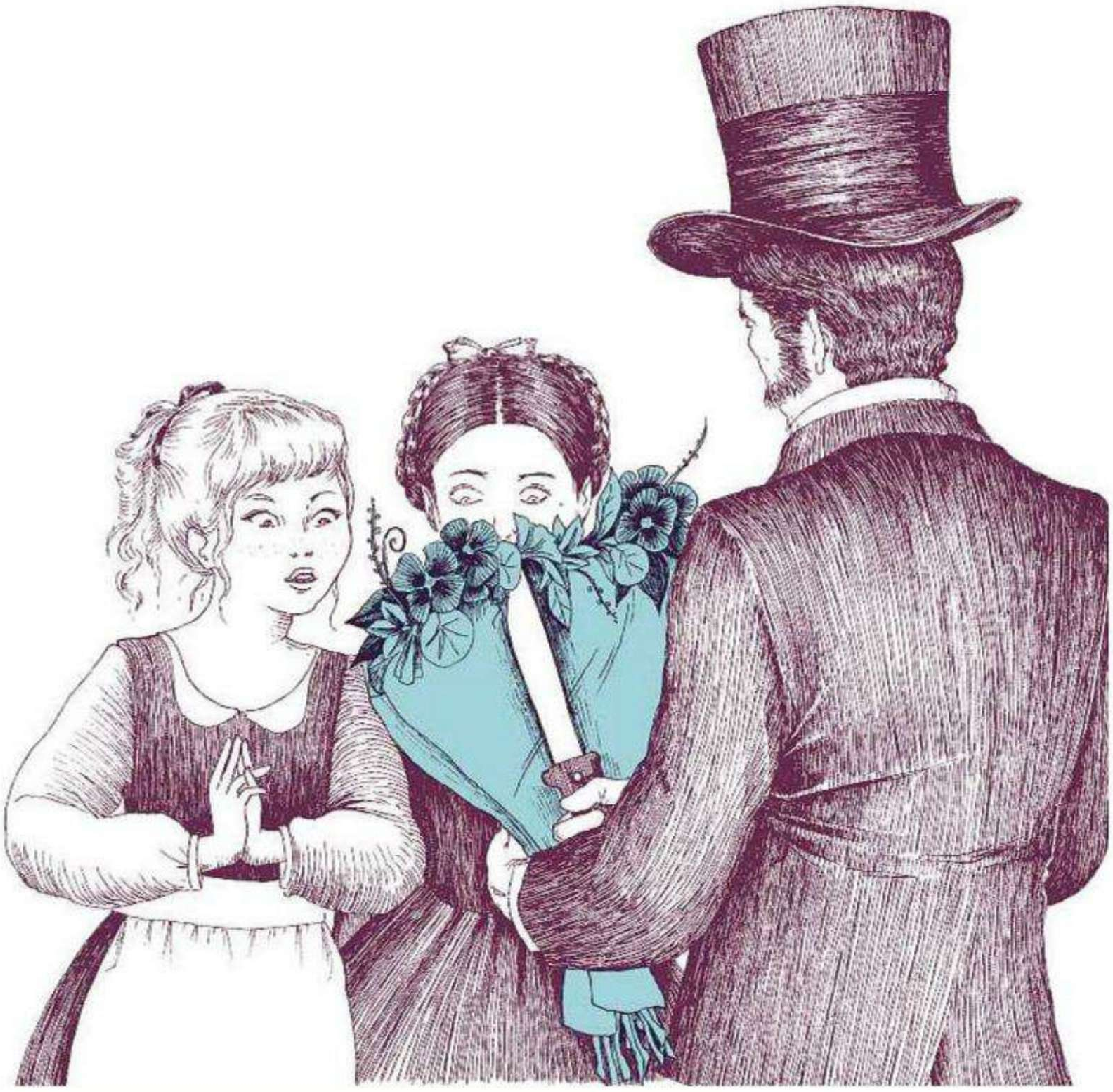
BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

32

PHILADELPHIA'S "JACK THE SLASHER" CASE

THEO PAIJMANS unearths a series of reports of knife attacks on women's feet in January 1905. Were they the vicious acts of a madman, or an example of "crowd hysteria" and press sensationalism?



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

A woman told the police: "I saw the man spring out upon two little girls. He had a bunch of flowers in his hand concealing a large, shiny knife. He was handing the flowers to the girls..."

They hide in the urban maze of the city's sprawl. They go by sinister names, such as the 'London Monster' or the 'Halifax Slasher'. After Jack the Ripper first stepped out of the shadows during that autumn of terror in 1888, a new, generic name was invented for these mystery assailants, aptly describing their deeds: Jack the Slasher.

One of them struck during the first month of 1905 in Philadelphia.

The events were foreshadowed by the brutal attack in that city upon 22-year-old Mary A Quinn, "a pretty girl from Wissahickon". She was found unconscious on the morning of 6 January and taken to hospital in critical condition. Her head and scalp were lacerated, one ear was bitten almost entirely off, and the young woman was suffering from severe shock. She could not give a clear description of her assailant, who had sprung from behind a fence late that night, but "The police feel confident that the man who attacked Miss Quinn is the same one who entered the home of a young woman living near the Manayunk police station about two weeks ago. He struck her several times in the face and then ran away. The police are unable to discover the motive for either attack".[1]

Nine days later, on 15 January, the reign of Jack the Slasher – sometimes known as Jack the Shoe-Slasher – began.

"According to reports to the police from no less than five women last evening, they were attacked by a 'Jack the Slasher', who wielded a knife or some other sharp instrument in a most dexterous fashion, cutting up their shoes and clothing, but in no instance inflicting injury. The descriptions in each case indicate that it was the same man in every instance. His object was not apparent, as after having slashed the clothing of his victims he made a safe escape... All of the attacks took place in the street at a time when numerous persons were passing, but as he chose dark corners and worked with a dexterous rapidity he could not be captured." The attacker was described as being about 5ft 7in (1.7m) tall with a sandy moustache and wearing a long black overcoat.[2]

A theory quickly became current that the assailant must have been "a crazy barber".[3] In the early morning and evening of 18 January, the assailant struck again in a different part of Philadelphia. This time, the victims were 14-year-old Ruth Zukoski and 18-year-old Miriam Haines: "'Jack the Slasher', who has been cutting the shoes of women in the southern section of the city for several days past, seriously injured a girl uptown yesterday morning, reappearing in west Philadelphia last evening, where he attacked a young woman. The mysterious individual has led the police a merry chase from one section of the city to another, and his movements have been so rapid that the detectives who are working on the case have been unable to get on his trail… Ruth Zukoski was returning home from a bakery about 6 o'clock yesterday morning, and as she walked through an alley she was confronted by a man with a long glistening knife. Before she could scream, the man stooped and slashed his knife across her ankle. She uttered a cry and the man darted away… it was found that a tendon had been severed… the girl may be permanently crippled… Miss Haines was returning home from a visit to a nurse at the Philadelphia Hospital last evening when she met the slasher. He leaped from behind a tree on 34th Street and seizing her by the arm threw her prone on the ground. Before she could rise he had cut her foot and was running away. Several university students saw the attack and started in pursuit of the fleeing man. He was far in advance of them, however, and made his escape… The police are confident that the man who attacked Miss Haines is the same who cut Ruth Zukoski and slashed several women downtown. All of his victims describe him as being about 30 years of age, tall and thin, with black hair and a black moustache. He wore a long overcoat. The police incline to the belief that he is demented."[4]

> "No less than five women were attacked by a 'Jack the Slasher', who wielded a knife or other sharp instrument, cutting up their shoes and clothing but in no instance inflicting injury."

By now, the unfolding events in Philadelphia obtained national coverage in other newspapers.[5] In the city, the police were still unable to capture the elusive assailant, who had made no attacks on the 19th and 20th, though the search continued. Jack the Slasher struck again in the night of 21 January: "'Jack the Slasher', the unearthly, dangerous will-o'-the-wisp, who has been cutting the shoes of women and children in all parts of the city, coming apparently from nowhere and vanishing in the same mysterious manner, reappeared in the southern section of the city last night. The result was literally a reign of terror. Children were kept indoors all evening, no woman left her home without a male escort, extra policemen were placed in the districts where the 'Slasher' was reported to have appeared, and several men who were acting suspiciously were placed under arrest. Half a score of complaints regarding the actions of the fanatical shoe-slasher were lodged with the police of the Moyamensing Avenue station before midnight. Some of those who had seen the man told coherent stories of his conduct. They describe him as being about 5ft 7in [1.7m] in height, with a dark beard and a long, flowing overcoat. This is the same description that has been given of the man since his first appearance about a week ago. The beard is the only part of the description that has been added since then. The police said last night that they believed that the whiskers were false…"

23-year-old Rebecca Kline was walking with her young niece between Fifth and Sixth streets on Wharton when she heard "the patter of feet and the swish of a man's overcoat coming quickly behind her. She had her little niece by the hand and started to run, dragging the child with her. When she saw that the man was reaching towards her, the woman screamed. The 'Slasher' turned and ran in the opposite direction." Around 9 o'clock, a woman alerted the police that she had seen the slasher in the public square at Fourth and Morris streets: "I saw the man spring out upon two little girls. He had a bunch of flowers in his hand concealing a large, shiny knife. He was handing the flowers to the girls. I didn't see them take the flowers, but if they had he could have leaned down and slashed at their feet." Having arrived at the scene, the police found it deserted. One girl, running to her home, corroborated the woman's story to the police. The whole night, police searched that section of the city, but without any result. "Nearly everybody, it seemed, had caught a fleeting view of the 'slasher', but none could tell where he had gone. 'He jumped from behind a tree and then ran down the street' was the best clue the police secured."[6]

Earlier that week, the police had arrested a man named Pietro Silvero, who "refused to give out any information about himself" and upon whom some "freshly cut bits of leather and some cutlery were found". He was taken into custody for 10 days, but a Philadelphia newspaper concluded: "Last night's escapades of the 'slasher' indicate he is still at large."[7] But while the police had searched through the southern part of the city in vain, Jack the Slasher reappeared in the northwest of Philadelphia that same night. There he cut the shoe of 14-year-old William Green, who described the assailant as "a tall, thin man wearing a light overcoat". An hour later, a young woman who refused to give her name said that she had been "pursued by a man with a knife, but succeeded in outrunning him. She gave the same description of the man".[8] A few days later, William Green retracted his story to the police; he had received his injuries by stepping on glass, he now claimed.[9] With Green's retraction, published on 27 January, came an end to the reign of terror that Jack the Slasher imposed upon Philadelphia. I can find no further accounts after 27 January in the Philadelphia newspapers available to me, with nationwide coverage having stopped before that date.

The features of Philadelphia's Jack The Slasher scare would seem to place it firmly within the framework of a social panic in the tradition of the ubiquitous *Mädchenstecher*, *piqueur* or girl stabber, alongside such notorious cases as the 1926–1927 Bridgeport Phantom Stabber and the 1938 Halifax Slasher.[10] I would be cautious, though, about writing off the Philadelphia scare as a 'moral panic' without grounds in reality and actual events. Having researched this kind of scare for quite a while now, I have found literally hundreds of cases in which mystery assailants and obsessed fetishists have indeed attacked women and girls, often resulting in wounds going far beyond those, for instance, in the Halifax case (there, a number of superficial wounds were said to be self-inflicted; I have also noted this in several of the cases that I have collected). Moreover, while these shadowy figures often went uncaught and unpunished, there are several instances of men actually brought to trial for their misogynistic misdeeds.

The events in Philadelphia began with an assailant who, at first, cut shoes and clothing, but did not inflict any physical harm on his victims. The height of the scare, though, saw the double attack on Ruth Zukoski, resulting in her terrible injury, and on Miriam Haines, who luckily received a far less serious injury to her foot. Eventually, after Green's seemingly false statement, the newspapers lost all interest and coverage of the Philadelphia Jack The Slasher scare vanished from the press, with no further accounts published after late January 1905.

But the greater scare was not over, as ensuing years would see further outbreaks of the ubiquitous 'Jack the Slasher' panic all over the world.

NOTES

[1] "Brutal Attack Upon Young Girl. Mysterious assailant of Miss Quinn of Wissahickon Is Sought by Police. Twice Beat Her Into Unconsciousness and She Is in Hospital in Serious Condition", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Pennsylvania, 7 Jan 1905.

[2] "Wielded Knife On The Skirts Of Five Women. Five Victims Attacked Down Town by 'Jack The Slasher' Last Night. Cut Off Shoes And Garments, Then Fled. Same Assailant Believed to Have Figured in Each Case – Police Search for Him", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 Jan 1905.

[3] *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 Jan 1905.

[4] "Jack The Slasher In Many Sections. Cut the Feet of One Woman and a Girl at Different Times Yesterday. Child May Be Crippled for Life. Police Think Man Is Demented", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 Jan 1905.

[5] *Washington Post*, Washington DC, 19 Jan 1905; "Rather Unique Criminal In Philadelphia. 'Jack The Shoe Slasher' Aims to Destroy Shoes and Perhaps Feet of Young Girls in Quaker City", *Tucson Citizen*, Arizona, 24 Jan 1905; "Shoe Slasher", *Argus and Patriot*, Montpellier, Vermont, 25 Jan 1905; *Daily Kennebec Journal*, Kennebec, Maine, 25 Jan 1905.

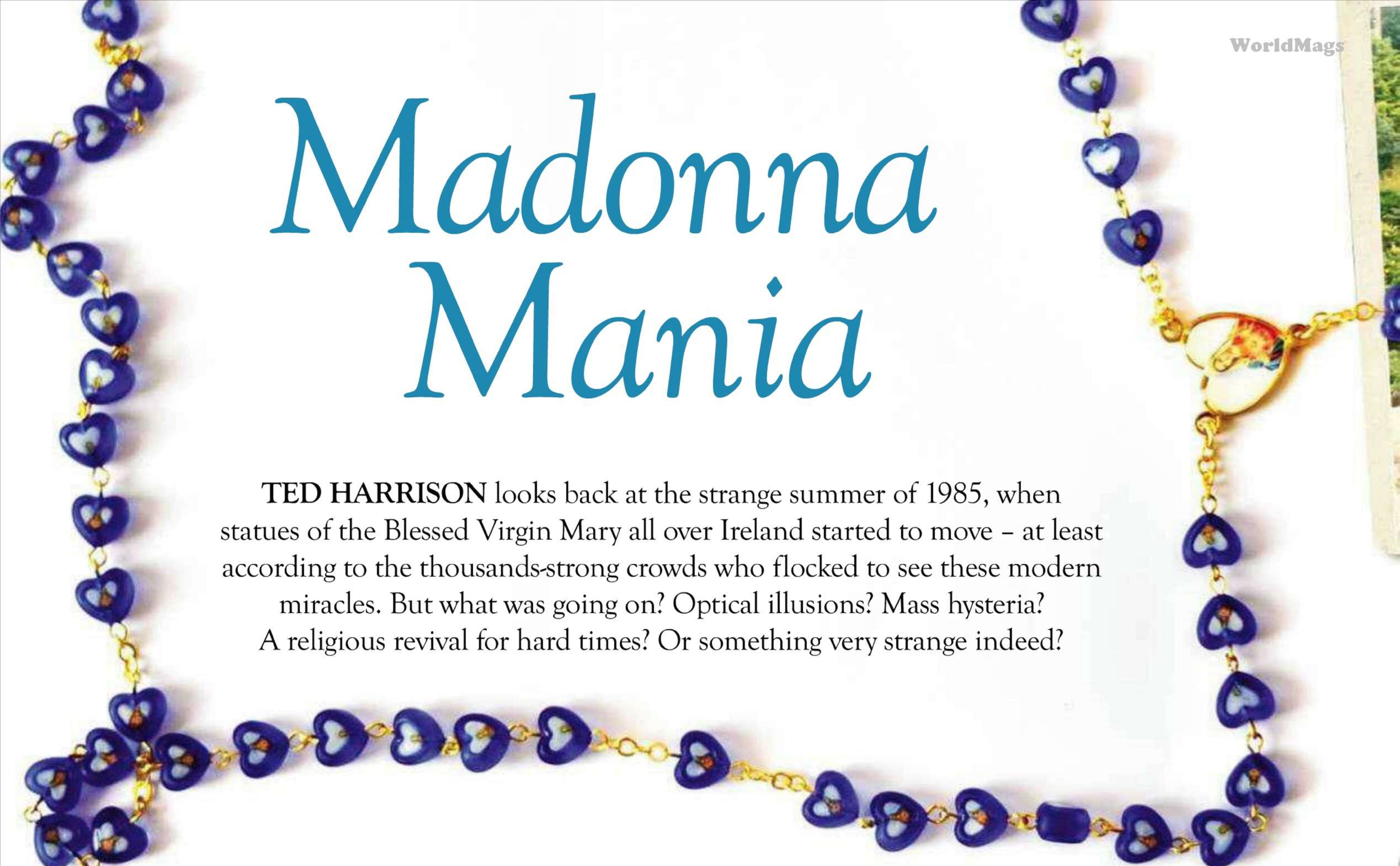
[6] "Shoe Slasher Tempts Victims With Flowers. Mysterious Assailant of Children Reappears on Downtown Streets. Was Scared Away By Woman's Screams", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 Jan 1905.

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] "Jack The Slasher Has Moved Up Town. Cut Boy's Shoe on Fairmont Ave, and Chased Young Woman With a Knife", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 Jan 1905.

[9] "Was Not Attacked by the Slasher", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 Jan 1905.

[10] See Jan Bondeson: *The London Monster: A Sanguinary Tale*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.



Madonna Mania

TED HARRISON looks back at the strange summer of 1985, when statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary all over Ireland started to move – at least according to the thousands-strong crowds who flocked to see these modern miracles. But what was going on? Optical illusions? Mass hysteria? A religious revival for hard times? Or something very strange indeed?

The summer of 1985 was a strange time to be in Ireland, as rumours of miracles and extraordinary events swept the country.

It was the summer when I went to Ireland and saw for myself a solid, inanimate statue of the Virgin Mary appear to sway from side to side.

The moving statue epidemic started in February that year. By September, almost 50 separate claims of moving statues and other strange phenomena had been reported at religious sites across the country. It was the year of Madonna Mania! [see **FT45:6–7, 30–34**]

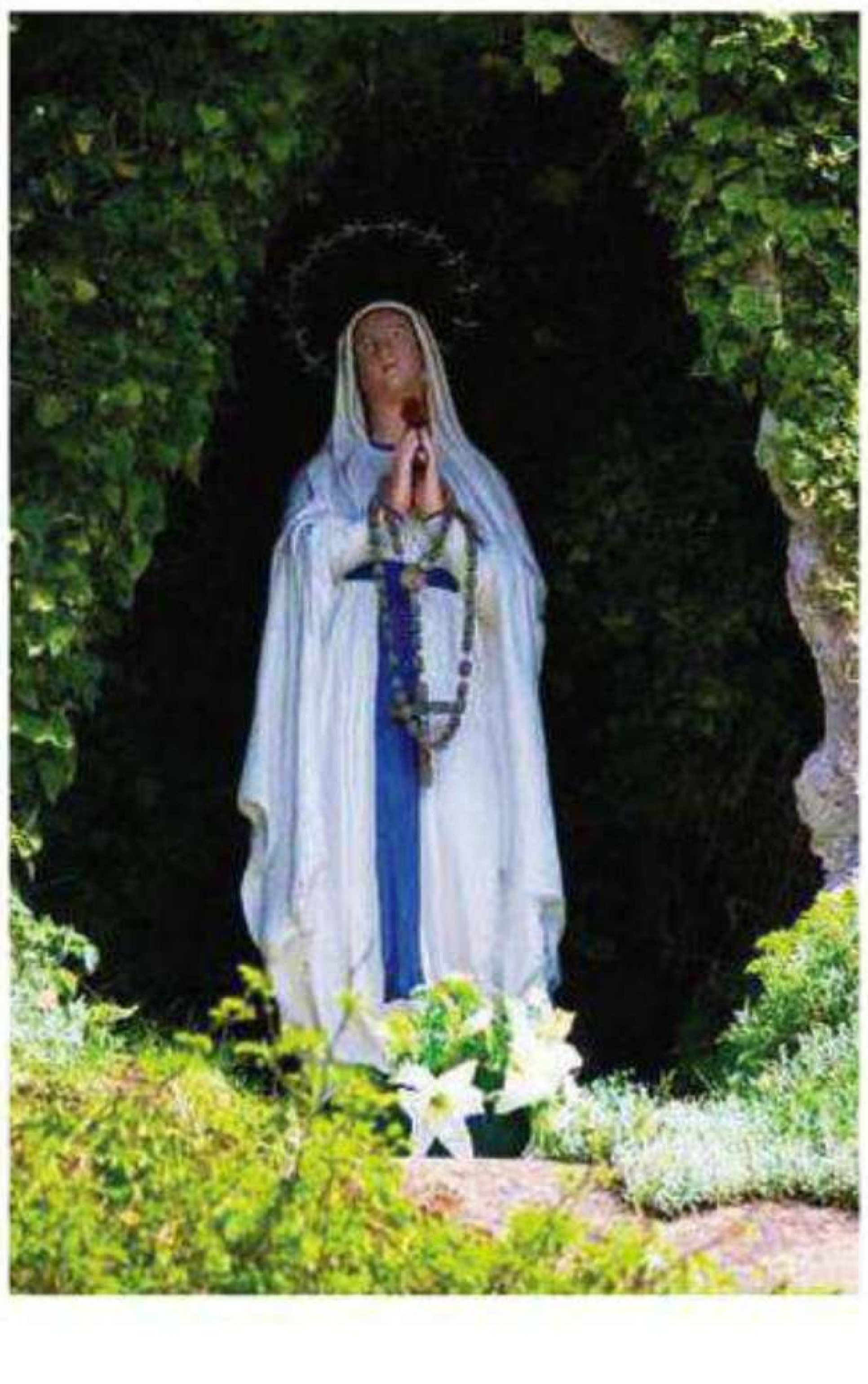
It all began on Valentine's Day, when at Asdee, County Kerry, a seven-year-old girl, Elizabeth Flynn, said she saw religious statues in the parish church move.

Her story was backed up by her older brother and sister and later, when they told their friends what had happened, some 30 children went to the church eager to see things for themselves. Several of them also claimed to see the statues behaving oddly. Word spread rapidly and at Sunday mass the congregation filled the church; an overflow crowd gathered outside.

A month later, a statue in Ballydesmond, Co. Cork, performed a similar feat. Again, children were the witnesses. Although on this occasion their parents dismissed their stories as products of overactive imaginations, curious visitors started to come to the church to see the statue for themselves.

The Roman Catholic Church tried to play down the two events. A Msgr Dermot O'Sullivan issued a statement emphasising that the 'moving statues' of Asdee would not be accepted as a miracle by the Roman Catholic Church until all other possible explanations had been thoroughly checked out. In the meantime, he said, the Church would not encourage people to visit Asdee or Ballydesmond on pilgrimage.

In 1985, I saw an inanimate statue of the Virgin Mary sway from side to side...



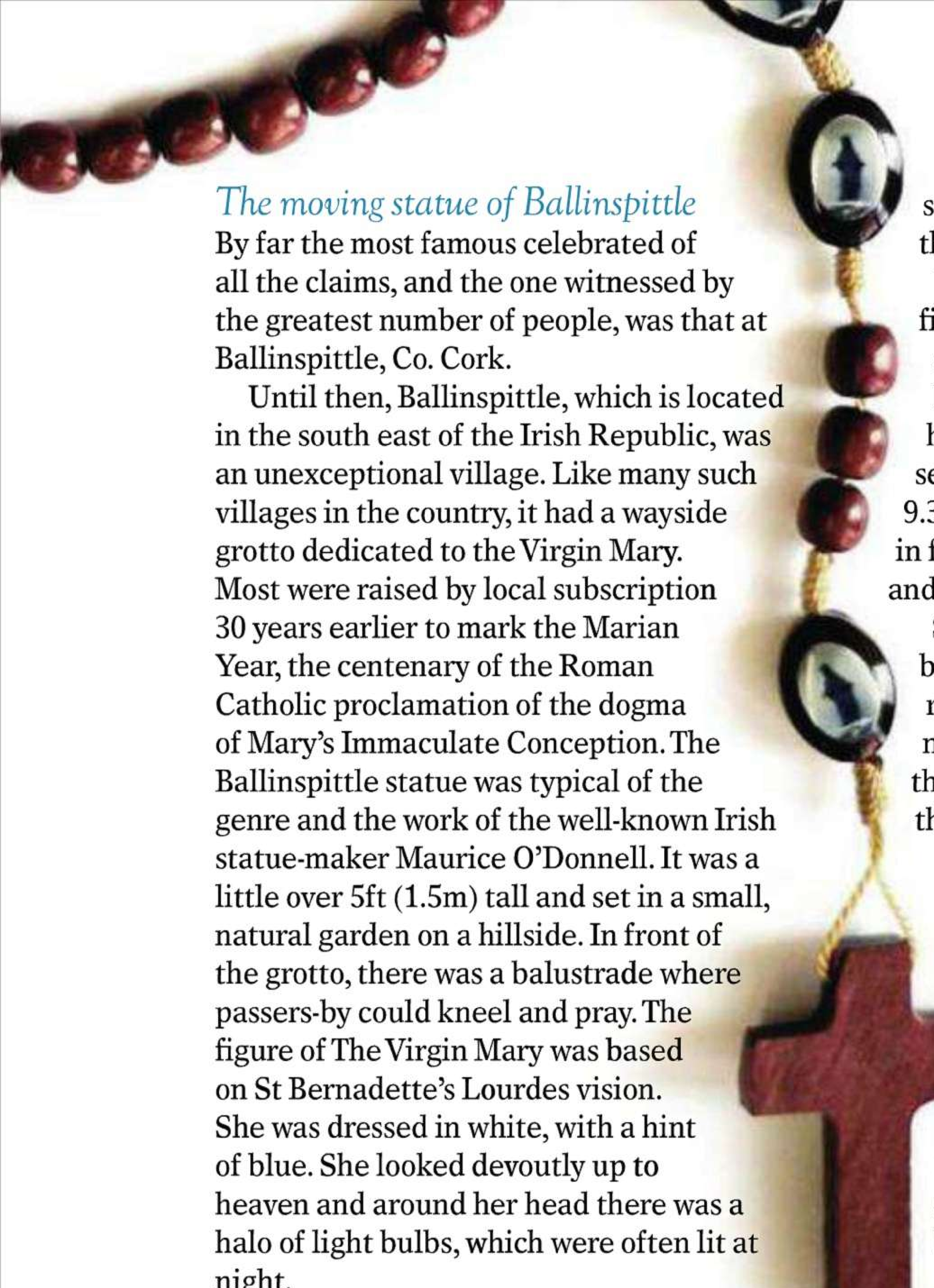
THIS PAGE: (STATUE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AT BALLINSPITTLE) ALAMY / STEPPENWOLF

Despite this total lack of official encouragement, as spring turned to summer, a trickle of such claims turned into a torrent. In 1986, researcher Lionel Beer published a list of 47 locations in Ireland from which strange phenomena were reported or rumoured. The majority of these phenomena were moving statues, but in September, at Carns, County Sligo, four schoolgirls described seeing a vision in the night sky of St Bernadette of Lourdes kneeling at the feet of the Virgin Mary. It only lasted a few minutes, but when rumours of the vision spread, huge crowds gathered at the site. Over the weekend, a fortnight after the first report, it is estimated 20,000 people visited Carns, causing major traffic congestion.

Narrow lanes the length and breadth of rural Ireland became blocked with vehicles as the summer of 1985 progressed. Most weekends, and many evenings, thousands of Catholics from the towns took to their cars, or organised bus outings, to see if they could witness a miracle for themselves.

Mother-of-three Denise Lynch recalled how the curious and the faithful came in their thousands to Asdee, where it had all started. Twenty-five years after the events, she told the *Irish Examiner* that so many candles were being burned in the church that someone had to be on duty to clear them away so that more could be lit. "People came from all over the country to see the statues. When you look back on it, it was really amazing."

ALL PHOTOS SHOW PILGRIMS AT BALLINSPITTLE.
TOP LEFT & BOTTOM RIGHT: LIONEL BEER
CENTRE: ECHO PUBLICATIONS, IRELAND
BOTTOM LEFT: REX FEATURES / DAILY MAIL / MONTY FRESCO



The moving statue of Ballinspittle

By far the most famous celebrated of all the claims, and the one witnessed by the greatest number of people, was that at Ballinspittle, Co. Cork.

Until then, Ballinspittle, which is located in the south east of the Irish Republic, was an unexceptional village. Like many such villages in the country, it had a wayside grotto dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Most were raised by local subscription 30 years earlier to mark the Marian Year, the centenary of the Roman Catholic proclamation of the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception. The Ballinspittle statue was typical of the genre and the work of the well-known Irish statue-maker Maurice O'Donnell. It was a little over 5ft (1.5m) tall and set in a small, natural garden on a hillside. In front of the grotto, there was a balustrade where passers-by could kneel and pray. The figure of The Virgin Mary was based on St Bernadette's Lourdes vision. She was dressed in white, with a hint of blue. She looked devoutly up to heaven and around her head there was a halo of light bulbs, which were often lit at night.

Before the statue became a major object of national and international interest, it was a focus of occasional devotion for local people. The more devout churchgoers passing by might pause to say a 'Hail Mary' or place some flowers at the Virgin's feet.

Then on 22 July 1985, Kathy O'Mahony, one of the grotto caretakers, while out for a walk with her daughters, reported seeing the statue move.

"It was as if she was breathing," she said. "She was life-like, maybe sighing, her chest was moving." Her daughters reported seeing the hands move. They were surprised, but not alarmed. "It gave me a sense of peace," Kathy recalled.

They quickly reported what they had seen to friends and neighbours, who also went to look at the statue. A member of the statue committee is quoted as saying, "I thought I'd better go and see what these nutcases were up to. I joined about 40 people saying the rosary. Then I saw the statue move. I got a terrible fright." [1]

Two days later, a Garda sergeant saw the statue vibrate and was even concerned that it might fall over.

When Sergeant John Murray had first heard about the moving statue, he says, his reaction was "rubbish". But he lived locally, and out of curiosity he went with his wife and children to see what was going on. It was around 9.30pm and they found about 400 people in front of the statue saying the rosary and singing hymns.

Speaking on an RTE documentary broadcast in 2010, Murray said he remains convinced that what he witnessed next was real. He says he saw the statue of the Virgin Mary fly through the air.

"I heard a collective intake of breath and I looked up at the statue and to my mind it was airborne. It was floating on air.

"I was really convinced it was a hoax of some sort. But as a police officer, I was concerned for the crowd's safety. I walked right in around the grotto and searched around the surrounding bushes and grounds.

"I was convinced I would find a system of wiring to cause this effect and I was absolutely amazed when I didn't see it.

"Early the next morning on my way into work I stopped at the grotto. I climbed up to the statue and tried to move it but it was stuck in the concrete."

"Events achieved national coverage in less than five days," noted Lionel Beer. "A new grotto committee of local people was convened to supervise the crowds. Reports suggest that the majority of nocturnal visitors to the shrine in the early days thought they saw movement. Many left genuinely puzzled as to whether they had seen a miraculous vision, or been subject to an optical aberration." [2]

Events became even more confusing and bizarre when many viewers watching an RTE television report about Ballinspittle claimed to see the face of Christ on the screen. However, engineers who reviewed the videotape of the news could find nothing untoward.

From July, through August and September, Ballinspittle attracted thousands of visitors every day – a total of 500,000 people it was later estimated. They gathered in the field opposite, from where they had a good view. A loudspeaker system was rigged up to lead the prayers. Temporary loos were provided and lines of fish and chip vans arrived to take full advantage of an unexpected business opportunity.

Such was the international interest that I was despatched by the BBC to make a Radio 4 documentary.

Interventions or illusions?

On the first evening after arriving in Ireland, I drove out from Cork along the winding lanes towards Ballinspittle. Despite the grey skies and the landscape being shrouded in drizzle, the lanes around the village were teeming with activity and lined with buses and parked cars. The chip vans were doing brisk business. In the sloping field opposite the grotto, there were around 1,000 people. They stood gazing intently at the statue, about 30 yards (27m) away. Many were fingering their rosary beads and murmuring the words of the 'Hail Mary' and 'Our Father' in response to those being broadcast over the loudspeaker.

By the time I arrived, it was almost dark. The bulbs of the statue's halo were lit and looked like a semi-circle of small stars above the Virgin's head. From time to time someone in the crowd would exclaim, "She moved!" and describe excitedly to a neighbour what the statue had just appeared to do. Sometimes there would be gasps of surprise. Occasionally, one of the worshippers would offer a prayer for a sick friend or relative out loud.

I found a place in the field to stand and concentrated on looking at the statue and waiting to see what happened. People around me saw movement, but I did not. Then, after a several minutes of continuous staring, I too saw the statue appear to move. She did not raise her arms or try to give me a message, but the figure, which had been completely motionless and inanimate, seemed to sway from side to side.

Had I been looking for a miracle, I might have claimed that I'd seen one. My response, however, was more dispassionate. I reviewed in my own mind what I had seen and looked around me at others who, presumably, were seeing the same thing. I noted firstly that at the precise moment I saw the statue move, no one else claimed to have done so. Indeed, as far as I could see, no two people ever saw movement at exactly the same time as each other. This suggested that the movement was not attributable to the statue, but to the observer.

This was consistent with one explanation offered by psychologist Dr Jurek Kirakowski of The University of Cork and his team.

LEFT AND FACING PAGE: These photos from 1985 reveal the sheer size of the crowds which turned out to witness the Ballinspittle phenomena.

REX FEATURES / DAILY MAIL / MONTY FRESNO

TOP: ECHO PUBLICATIONS, IRELAND

"What could be happening at Ballinspittle is that when you were there at twilight you hadn't got visual contact with your immediate surroundings," he explained to me when I visited him in his office shortly after my evening at Ballinspittle. "As is usual, if you are standing still, you are going to start swaying very slightly on your feet to keep balance. Perhaps your neck will start trembling if you have been staring for too long. And on the back of your eye you will see the image of that little statue and you will see it moving. Because you are not aware that it is you who are moving, you will interpret that movement as being the statue."

But to explain how individuals might believe they have seen a statue move is not to explain Madonna Mania. The swaying object optical illusion must surely have been seen before at many of Ireland's shrines. Indeed, the illusion can be seen almost on demand by anyone standing in the dark looking at a lamppost. So why, in 1985, did this optical illusion receive special attention? Why did the nation go moving statue mad?

Some commentators blamed the media. Peter Mulholland of the National University of Ireland at Maynooth argued that only a relatively small number of people ever took the apparitions seriously and that interest in them was largely media-generated.

He was not alone in holding this view. "As soon as one incident is reported, another is recorded elsewhere, triggering off a reaction that tends to escalate," one self-confessed church sceptic, the Prior of the Dominican Order in Limerick, was reported as saying.

> *"As soon as one incident is reported, there is another elsewhere..."*

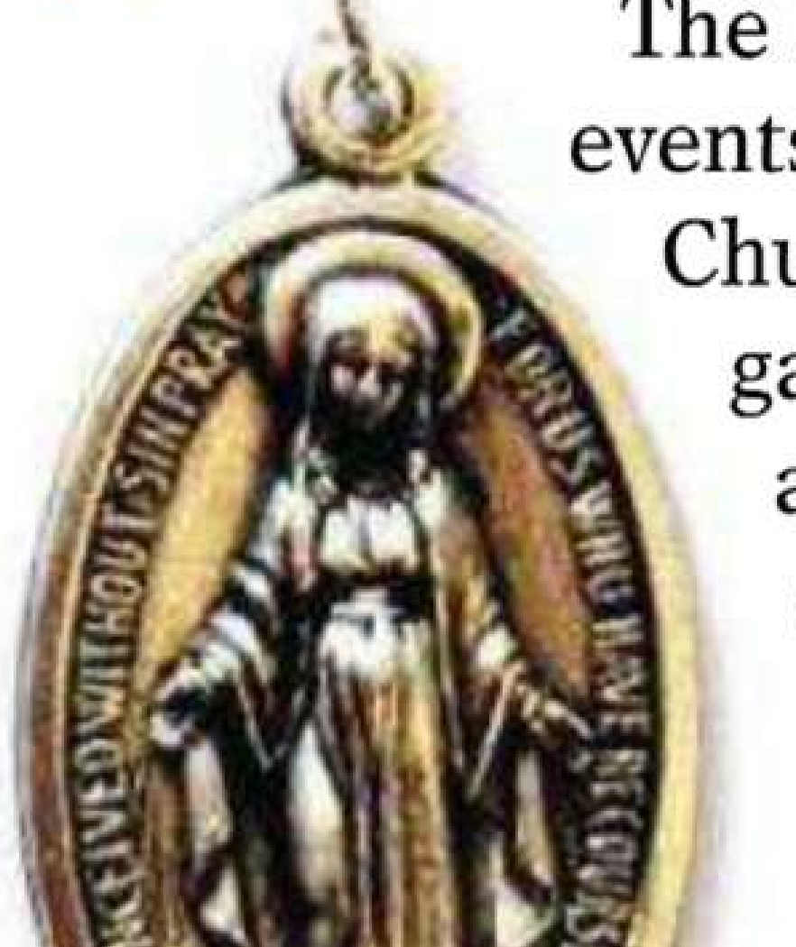
The official Church line was to neither approve nor disapprove. In its usual way, it kept its distance and waited to see how events panned out. The normal pattern is that the Church allows some time to pass and if, after several decades, interest has not faded, it offers its retrospective blessing.

When I spoke to him that September, the Bishop of Cork and Ross, Michael Murphy, had not visited Ballinspittle. Without in any way endorsing the miraculous claims, he acknowledged the interest in moving statues had been good for church attendance.

Supernatural intervention, he said, was possible, but extremely rare. He did, however, note with approval that the gatherings at the 'miraculous' grottos were generally very devout and prayerful.

He suggested that the upsurge in accounts of moving statues should be viewed from a social rather than a religious perspective.

"First of all, we've had a very depressing summer. We are living in very difficult times in Ireland. We have very high unemployment. Within the church there is a certain questioning of accepted values, matters of faith; and then there is the threat of nuclear destruction, felt by young people very much, I think."



The bishop accepted there that recent events might have a message for the Church. "They are very devotional gatherings," he noted. "Perhaps as a Church we have not paid enough attention to the emotional side of religion. Certainly there has been no attempt to promote a genuine lay spirituality and popular devotion. There has of late been a great emphasis on the intellectual side of things."

Although the bishop made no direct mention of this, the phenomena of 1985 coincided with several social scandals widely reported in the Irish press concerning babies born to unmarried mothers. The harsh disapproval of the Church towards illegitimacy and sexual relations outside marriage had led, it was claimed, to the tragic deaths of babies. At that time, too, the Church was involved in a parliamentary battle to halt the liberalisation of the law on contraception. Some Catholics saw the 'supernatural' intervention of Mary in Irish life as a re-enforcement of the Church's traditional teaching on moral values.

It was the local postmaster, Daniel

Costello, who shrewdly observed to me that people show an interest in the supernatural "when times are hard. In times of prosperity it's a case of God is in his Heaven and all is right with the world, but then in times of recession, as now, when their whole way of life is upside down, it is time to look to a more supernatural approach to their dilemma. I have heard that after the war in Italy, 300 statues moved and whether that was the Virgin in Heaven trying to console her people, or what, I don't know."

Lionel Beer described as "cynical" the suggestion that the phenomena in Ireland that summer "were not unconnected with the poor tourist season. Although the hotel and catering trade in the south of Cork subsequently benefited, this was an unworthy inference. If the phenomena had been purely limited to wobbling statues, the 'bright lights seen against a dark background' explanation might have been adequate. However, claims have included facial changes, anatomical movements, illusions of blood, messages and luminous projections where no statue or grotto existed." [3]

Events in Ireland paralleled those happening at the same time in other parts of the world, Beer noted, in particular the visions reported from Medjugorje. There, in what was then Yugoslavia, six people had reportedly witnessed appearances of the Virgin Mary on a regular basis since 1981. They claimed to have heard her give messages calling the world to prayer and repentance. "Students of 'fortean' phenomena and those with an interest in the deeper meaning of life may well conclude that in amongst the 'noise', something very strange is going on," Beer wrote.

Modern Miracles

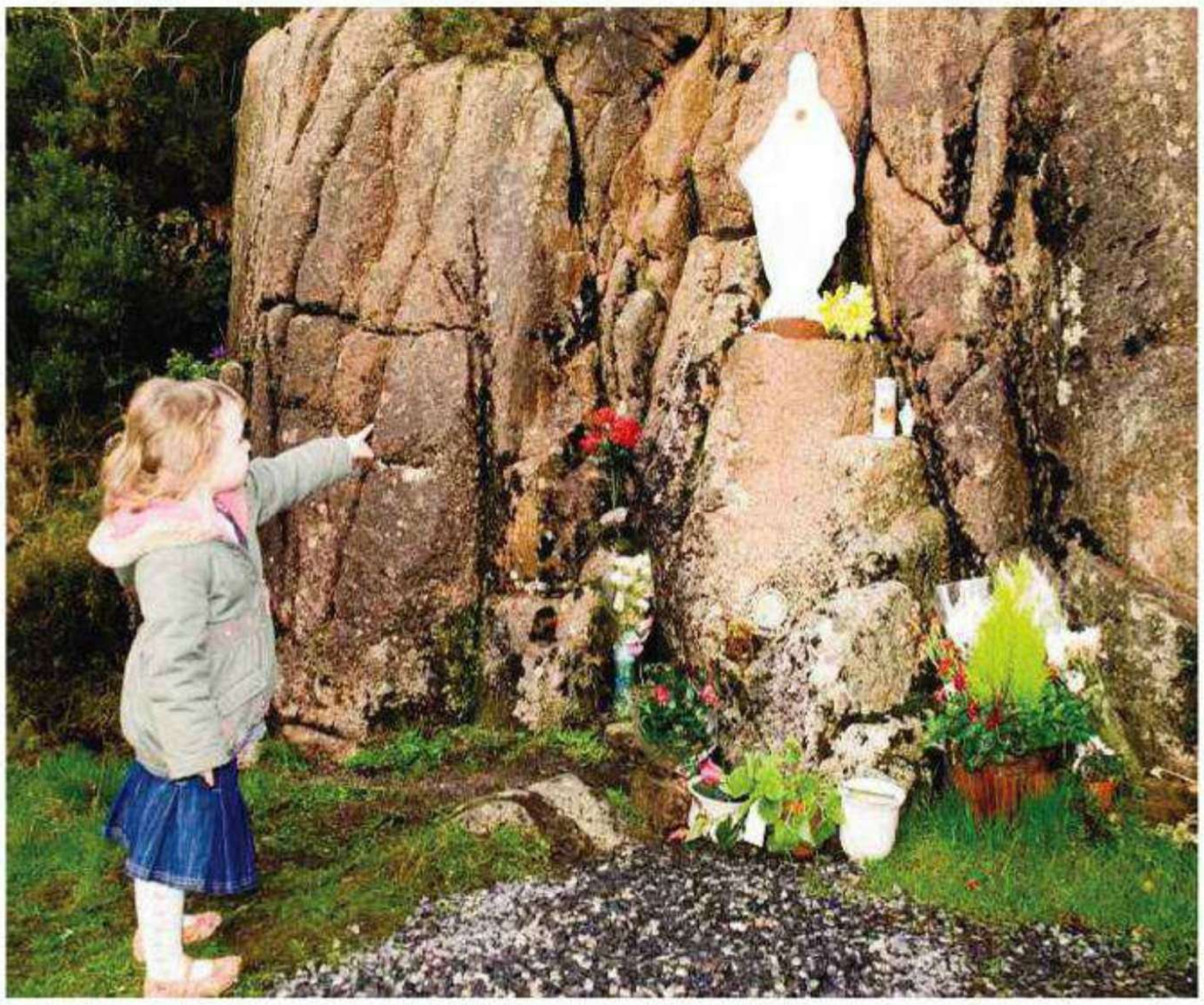
I certainly met people at the Ballinspittle site who claimed they had seen more than simple movement when looking at the statue. One man I spoke to described how the face of Mary would sometimes change to that of Christ, and others reported seeing the Virgin's cloak billowing out.

From other sites emerged claims of statues blinking or moving their arms. Statues, according to some unconfirmed rumours, had been seen to walk and talk.

On the same trip to Ireland in 1985, I also went to Mount Melleray in County Waterford where there was another, much reported, animated statue. This one I found in a woodland grotto near the Cistercian Abbey. Whatever had happened originally, by the time I got there the stories of miraculous deeds were being extensively embellished. Children reported hearing the Virgin speak to them and, I was told, were encouraged to relay her messages to the crowds.

Marian expert Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, from the University of Kansas, who made a study of the events that summer at Mount Melleray, reported the messages in detail. In particular, the Virgin was asking for prayer and suggesting that Ireland, as a nation, had a special role to play in alerting the world to the need to repent. If comfort and solace were being offered in difficult times, she suggested, "it would seem that this should be understood in terms of the emergence of a religious world view which draws on and modifies the tradition of public Marian apparitions in order to establish Ireland as a place of apocalyptic and religious significance."

Ireland was not unique in being 'favoured' with visitations from the mother



ALAMY / RICHARD WAYMAN

ABOVE: The shrine to the Virgin at Kerrytown was the site of Marian apparitions as recently as 2007.

A MADONNA MANIA GAZETTEER

Lionel Beer's list of moving statues and similar phenomena reported in Ireland in 1985, listed by county.

County Carlow:
Carlow, St Dympna's Hospital
Rossmore Hill near Carlow
County Clare:
Bridgetown
Broadford
Clarecastle
Cratloe
Ennis Cathedral
Ennis, the grounds of the Friary
Corofin
Kilkee
County Cork:
Ballinspittle
Ballydesmond
Belgooly, near Kinsale
Farranree, Cork City
Courtmacsherry
Dunmanway
Mitchelstown
County Dublin:
Inchicore, the grounds of The Oblate Church
County Kerry:
Asdee
Killarney (rumoured to be a deliberate hoax)
Rathmore (visitors attracted to odd nocturnal sounds coming from a statue; caused by an owl)
County Kildare:
Monasterevin
County Kilkenny:
Dunkitt
Mooncoin
County Laois:
Abbeyleix, outside Knock Church
Killeshin
Spink, near Abbeyleix
Stradbally
County Leitrim:
Carrick-on-Shannon
County Limerick:
Foynes
Garryowen, Limerick
St Mary's Park Estate, Limerick
Moycross Estate, Limerick
Cathermoyle
Coolard
Mainster
Mountcollins
County Mayo:
Knock
County Monaghan:
Doohamlet, Castleblaney
County Sligo
Carns, near Culleens
County Tipperary:
Roscrea
County Waterford:
Mount Melleray Cistercian Abbey
Waterford, Mercy Convent School
County Wexford:
Camolin, near Ferns
Enniscorthy
Glenbrien
Rocklands

of God, it was implied, but her visitations did suggest that the nation had a special status in the religious affairs of the world.

What was happening, Zimdars-Swartz suggested, was that modern Ireland was experiencing events which had once been much more common. "During the Middle Ages," she wrote, "devotees of a particular saint often reported that the saint had appeared to them. Most popular of all the saints was the Virgin Mary and reports of her appearances to the faithful abounded. Common too were reports that statues of the Virgin moved or came alive and interacted with human beings.

"While the Reformation brought the demise of these phenomena in those areas most subject to its influence, they have continued within Roman Catholicism. Reports of apparitions and of statues which move have not ceased with the advent of the so-called modern age." [4]

In fact, between 1928 and 1973, more than 200 reported appearances came to the attention of the Roman Catholic authorities.

Ireland's most famous apparition was some years earlier at Knock, County Mayo, in 1879. Today, the village is the centre of a major pilgrimage business, as popular as ever following Pope John Paul II's visit there on the centenary of the vision. Such is its fame and widespread appeal that there is even an airport to bring in the pilgrims.

But if the villagers of Ballinspittle had hopes that their grotto would become as famous, they were to be disappointed.

By the autumn, following the summer of devotion, the crowds had dwindled to just a handful of the faithful. On 31 October, they were praying in front of the statue when three men arrived. After insulting the worshippers by calling them "stupid fools for worshipping a plaster statue" they attacked the Virgin with a hammer and an axe. After desecrating the site and causing extensive damage, they drove off. They were later identified as coming from Dublin. "Nuns see Virgin Statue smashed," said one tabloid headline.

The statue was taken away and repaired by its original maker. Since then, although it is back in its place in the grotto and some new rumours of movement have circulated, the Ballinspittle BVM has never again attracted the massive crowds of 1985.

In fact, since that extraordinary summer, Ireland's religious statues have generally remained static, although from time to time stories of Marian apparitions do surface.

In 2007 Joe Coleman from Ballyfermot, near Dublin, was at Kerrytown, near Dungloe, County Donegal (**FT257:20**), visiting a shrine which had been the focus of pilgrimage since the Virgin Mary was seen there in 1939. Joe later wrote a description of what happened.

"At 3 o'clock [in the] afternoon, we were at the Rock in Kerrytown, praying the Rosary. There were about 50 people there, men, women and children… During the first 10 minutes, I noticed the face of Mary change to her Son Jesus, it then changed to Padre Pio, then back to Jesus, and then back to Mary. I had seen Mary before some months earlier in the summer… She was crying tears of great sadness for the children of Ireland. She asked me to tell all the people that had come to the rock, that everybody would receive a cure on this day at the rock. I got very emotional. And the tears started to flow down my face. It was a feeling of great love, great joy, unconditional love came from Mary as she shone her beautiful light out among the crowd, she was crying she said she was very sad that our young people are not saying the rosary."

There is no reason to question that what Joe Coleman described he genuinely believed to be real. But did he, as might others who have claimed similar visions over the years, add some Irish poetic license to the account? Maybe, but what he claimed to have happened was within a well-established tradition of Irish Catholic experience.

The time I spent in Ireland that summer was, as I wrote back then, "bizarre". In almost any other part of the British Isles the events I was reporting on would have been dismissed as so strange or unbelievable as to be of little general concern. Anyone, anywhere else, seeing a moving or talking statue would have been labelled fanciful at best, mad at worst.

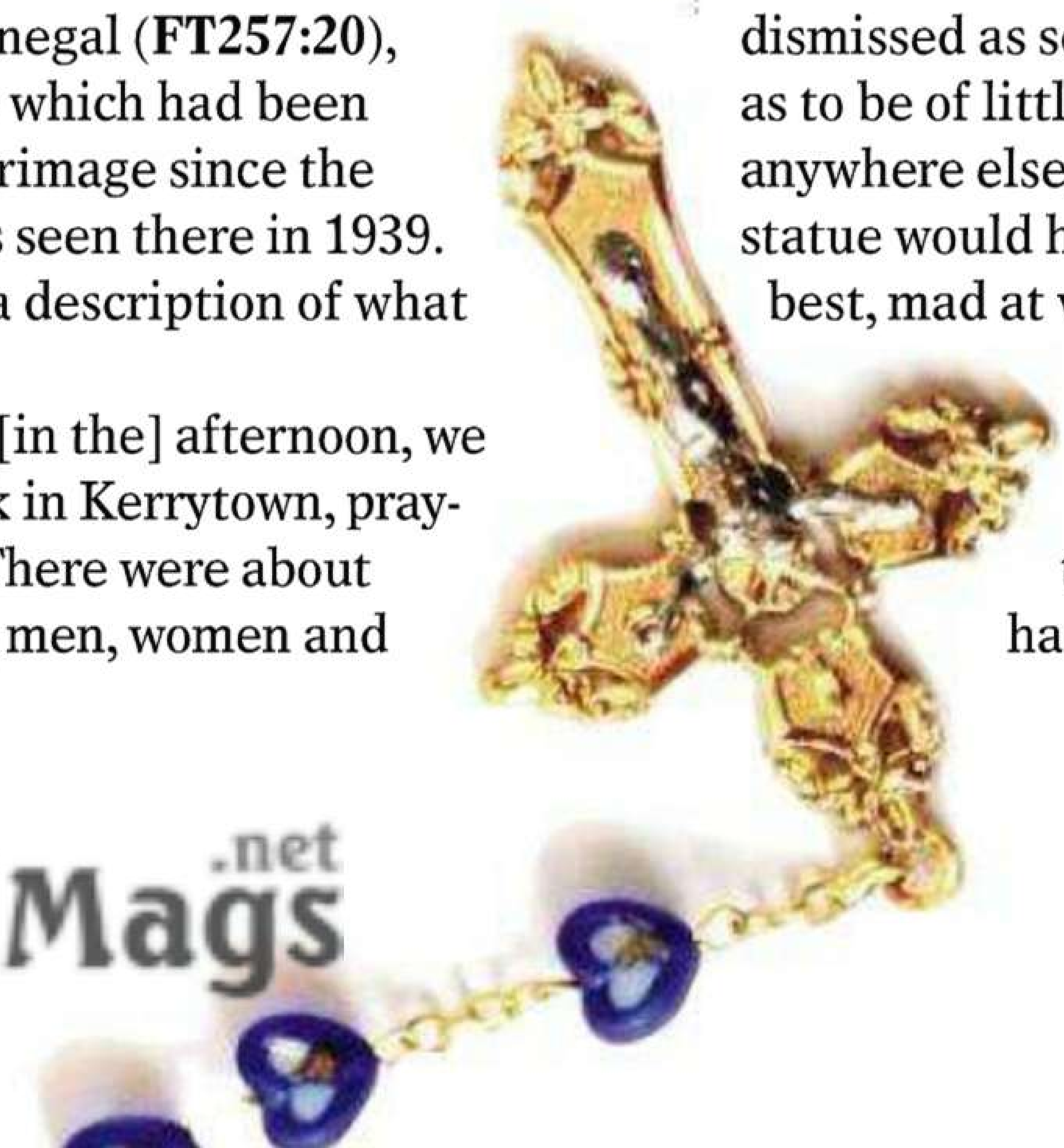
But there in Ireland, dozens of friendly, rational and intelligent people talked of the improbable events they had witnessed or heard about in a totally matter-of-fact manner.

The moving statues might be explained rationally in terms of optical illusions viewed, in the context of a devoutly, but troubled, Catholic country, by a people whose culture has a strong tradition of poetry and storytelling. Nevertheless, the question remains, why, in 1985, did accounts of such events appear in such profusion? Why was there an Irish summer of Madonna Mania? Was it attributable to the general downbeat mood of the nation at the time? Did it have something to do with 1985 being the year that the rigid hold of the church on Irish society was starting to weaken? Or was there, in the words of Lionel Beer, indeed "something very strange going on"? **FT**

PETITIONS —
ONLY

JOE CASHIN

ABOVE: A shrine to the BVM at Mount Melleray, Co. Waterford, scene of another moving statue in 1985.



Lionel Beer's *The Moving Statue of Ballinspittle & Related Phenomena* is available for £2.25 (£2.50 colour) from www.spacelink.fsworld.co.uk

NOTES

1 Lionel Beer: 'The Moving Statue of Ballinspittle and Related Phenomena', *Spacelink*, 1986, p15.

2 *ibid* p13.

3 *ibid* p37.

4 Sandra L Zimdars-Swartz: *Archives des sciences socials des religions* Vol 67/1, 1989.

Author Biography

TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent and author of many books, including *Diana: making of a Saint* (2007). He also produced the documentary *And Did Those Feet?*

FBI FORTEAN BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

112. Meeting Raven Kaldera

GEORGE BINNING meets Raven Kaldera, pagan shaman, herbalist, transgender god-slave and servant of Baphomet.

Being a pagan shaman is a complex role. “It’s the only job for which being transgender is not just an advantage but a necessity,” says Raven Kaldera, who has been a herbalist, author, transgender activist, ordeal-master, god-slave and shaman for over a decade now.

Earlier this year, Raven undertook a teaching tour of pagan BDSM (yes, that’s pagan Bondage, Dominance, Sadism & Masochism) lectures and workshops across Europe, accompanied by Jessica, Raven’s daughter (who naturally calls him ‘mum’), and Joshua, his slave (“The ‘slave’ word,” says Raven, “I don’t like it, but there isn’t a better one.”). Meanwhile, Raven’s wife Bella has been looking after Cauldron Farm, the Massachusetts homestead where they grow vegetables and keep goats, sheep and chickens.

Amid this intense programme, Raven took a little time out to see the Chelsea Physic Garden and spend a while in conversation with *FT*.

“I’m a herbalist and a garden geek so I really love these plants,” he says, delighted by the 17th-century Apothecary’s garden.

It’s not every day I get to relax on a park bench with a transsexual shaman, and I wonder how he became one.

For Raven, as with shamans throughout history, it began with the shamanic calling, brought on by a near-death experience while battling with lupus. Shamanism is an especially challenging vocation as one’s working, spiritual, and personal lives are inextricably linked. More than that, shamans are ‘selected’ by the gods and, it seems, given no choice but to do what they are told.

“I was already a neo-pagan, certainly, but I had planned to be a science fiction writer and a folk musician on my little farm… but then it came out of nowhere.

“During this drawn-out illness, I had a massive vision of the goddess who had been involved with me throughout my life. She wouldn’t tell me her name, but I knew she was a death goddess. We played a Rumpelstiltskin sort of game: ‘Are you Hecate? Are you Kali?’”

The goddess revealed herself to be Hela (or Hel), the Norse goddess of death, who set about transforming the stricken Raven.

“She hung me up, tore me apart like a butchered animal and rebuilt me. When I came to, I was different. I lost some fears, I lost some memories, I lost some personality traits, and there were some new things. I’d always been able to sense ghosts but now could see them much more clearly. I’d always been able to vaguely sense the presence of gods and divine entities, but suddenly they were there, like an electric fence.

“What’s happened to me is not something that’s going to happen to everyone – only a few people are called by the spirits to be a shaman. They only pick the people who would be good at it. For that reason, I don’t expect everyone to believe what I believe. I’m aware of how strange it can look, but the question is not whether it looks strange but whether it seems to work for that person.”

The experience left Raven at the beck and call of the various gods and goddesses he now works with. They have instructed him, for example, to learn 27 forms of divination and he asks for their advice on a daily basis.

Animistic religions such as neopaganism see spirits in everything from stones and the land itself, to plants and people. Spiritual herbalism is a large part of Raven’s work; through his eyes, the Physic Garden is alive with entities and every healing shrub and herb has a spirit of its own.

“You have to be able to talk to the spirits. There are two levels of plant spirit: there’s the spirit of that one plant, which may not be more intelligent than a chicken, and then there’s the grandfather or grandmother spirit, and every plant is a piece of their body. They are huge wise entities, many of which have a history of helping humans.”

Raven consults these spirits even to help with issues beyond general health, he says. “People come to me for all kinds of things. The biggest question put to me is: ‘What should I do with my life?’ But also they come to me if they think they’re seeing ghosts, and we’ll check if it is ghosts or if it’s something in their own heads, or something else. What is harder is when they’re suffering from a mental illness and picking up something real as well.”

Raven has congenital adrenal hyperplasia, a genetic abnormality that causes gender confusion in girls and very early puberty in boys. When he recovered from lupus, Raven’s goddess, Hela, told him to make the change from woman to man; it was a procedure he’d been considering for a while.

“I was told, ‘You need to do this’ and I was like, ‘But why?’ And Hela said, ‘I’m sending you where you’re needed most.’ I had held out for a long time because back in those days intersexuals weren’t supposed to get sex changes. I went ahead and took testosterone and had chest surgery. I decided to stick with the bits I’ve got, because they are what they are, and lower surgeries aren’t very good right now for FTMs [female-to-male transsexuals].

“It was a gamble, it was a leap in the dark, but it was absolutely wonderful. For me it was sacred shape-shifting. OK, socially it’s been very difficult, but y’know, it’s hard to be a minority.

“The irony was that I went through my second puberty at 30, around the same time my daughter went through normal puberty.”

The celestial root of transsexual conditions is a mismatch between what Raven describes as the physical body and the energy body. He describes what it is like to feel gender dysphoria.

“It’s kind of like phantom limb syndrome: if you get your arm or your leg whacked off, for a very long time you feel an arm or a leg there. Physically, your brain doesn’t believe that your arm isn’t there, and it keeps giving you stimulus. On a cosmic level, your energy body is still whole, your energetic limb is still there communicating to your physical body.

“People who are transgender are born with the wiring to think that their bodies are maturing in a certain gender direction, and so they get phantom limb syndrome for bits they don’t have.”

Many pagan gods are intersexual or hermaphroditic, and shamanism has long been associated with transgenderism in various cultures. This mismatch between the energetic and physical bodies is actually an advantage in shamanism.

“Shamans have to work with their energy bodies a lot,” says Raven, “they have to shape-shift and things like that. If you grew up with an energy body that was different to your physical body, you’re used to that distance and

GEORGE BINNING

ABOVE: Raven Kaldera enjoys the tranquility of the Chelsea Physic Garden in London.

“Only a few are called by the spirits to be a shaman”

you’re used to being able to do things with your energy body that the ordinary person doesn’t even think about. I found that many transfolk are able to see and know and move their energy body around much faster than others.”

In spite of these spiritual benefits, transgender people are the victims of attacks and persecution around the world. Raven’s online advice to those considering sex change surgery makes for harrowing reading, and he is a fervent campaigner for transgender rights.

“People are being hunted down in the streets and murdered. In America, in November, we now have the transgender day of mourning where we get together and read off the list, which gets longer every year, of transgender people who have been murdered. The site www.gender.org/remember/ has all the names. Some were just hunted down and beaten to death in the streets, intersex babies were found dead in trashcans. It’s really sad. To be one of my people is to live in a war zone.”

Unsurprisingly, there is a kinkier side to Raven’s shamanism; his relationship with Baphomet (who he sees as a filth-eating god from 12th-century France), is jaw-dropping. “I didn’t know much about Baphomet till he showed up and started talking to me. The reason that he, or she, liked me is that he’s a hermaphroditic god. He can shift back and forth, but he’s always mixed.

“I’ve lent him my body. In Afro-Caribbean terms, I’m a ‘horse’, in that I will lend my body consensually to god-possession under certain circumstances or rituals. He makes sure, while he’s using my body, to leave me a lesson of some kind.”

As well as lending his body to Baphomet, Raven runs paganBDSM.org, Baphomet’s online temple, on which he sells books and publishes articles and poetry devoted to Baphomet along with instructions for some really quite bizarre sexual rituals. Be warned: the text is surreal and explicit.

“Baphomet made me accept my own sexual perversions. I was doing the whole ‘Oh, maybe I should purge myself of that,’ and he came down and he said, ‘This is a tool and you won’t be able to fix it anyway. It’s who you are, which means you have to use it. Get going!’”

As part of his shamanic duties, Raven is an ‘ordeal master’ acting as Baphomet’s tool to help others “let go of their junk” through spiritual BDSM.

“If you put BDSM into a spiritual context, it’s not a question of *if* something deep will come up; it’s a question of *when*.

“It has to be a very humble position. I am the one in charge, but it’s also all about the person who’s going through it. It’s not about my ego, it’s about me being the best possible instrument to help them to their underworld and back safely – especially with the gods watching. The gods and spirits, they love to smack you around with your ego.”

As we slowly tour the garden, our conversations about plants, spirits and gender identity blend into one great puddle of polytheism. Raven’s is a complete worldview, made possible by his pantheistic approach to spirituality. While doing my best to take on board what he says, my imagination throbs as we discuss the responsibilities of actually having a slave.

“Basically, Joshua has dedicated his life to serving me and to helping me to do my work. And because he enjoys that, it’s very fulfilling to him to be in a position of service. I am a slave myself: I am a god slave. This tattoo is my slave brand, and I am Hela’s property. She’s made it very clear to me that as I treat him, so I will be treated. If I’m a jerk to him, she will create circumstances to teach me the error of my ways.”

Although what Raven believes is far out – and even in his own words “perverted” – it is at least organic. I might be interested to spend a day in Raven Kaldera’s shoes, talking to gods and plants – although I’d make sure I was safely out of them before night fell. **FT**

GEORGE BINNING is a freelance journalist and avid fortean, interested in geometry and cereology. He produces idiotic zines and is a ‘prefect’ at the Idler Academy. georgebinning.wordpress.com.

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ver Jordan

For some time, our veteran colleague and friend **RICHARD SEARY** has been working on a 'linguistic commentary' on the *Tanakh* – the Hebrew Bible – making some surprising fortean discoveries along the way. In this instalment – the first of two – he examines the death of Moses and the influence of simulacra on the foundations of faith.

BACKGROUND IMAGE: MOUNT NEBO – VIEW OVER JORDAN VALLEY WITH INFORMATIVE PLAQUE
CREDIT: ALAMY / TTL IMAGES

Recently, I was on the western shore of the Dead Sea near the oasis of En Gedi, about 25km (16 miles) south of Qumran near Jericho, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. It was a hot day, 40°C (104°F) in the shade. The mountains change colour through the day, from dark in the morning shadows to almost white in the fierce midday sunlight, to an ever-deeper red until the rich purple seen before sunset. Suddenly, maybe an hour before sundown – as I looked across the Dead Sea to the Mountains of Moab to the north-east on the Jordanian side – the changing light revealed the gigantic form of an old man, complete with long hair, beard and robe, gazing skyward, in the topography of these stark, and largely uninhabited mountains.

Instantly, I recalled the words in the *Torah*: "*Moses ascended from the plains of Moab to Har-Nebo, to the summit of the cliff that faces Jericho, and HASHEM* [GOD] *showed him the entire land;* [from] *the Gilead as far as Dan… the entire land of Judah as far as the western sea; the Negev and the Plain – the valley of Jericho, city of date palms, as far as Zoar. And HASHEM said to him, '… I will give it to your offspring. I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross over to there.' So Moses… died there, in the land of Moab, by the mouth of HASHEM. He buried him… in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-pe'or, and no one knows his burial place to this day.*" (*Devarim* / Deuteronomy 34:1–6)

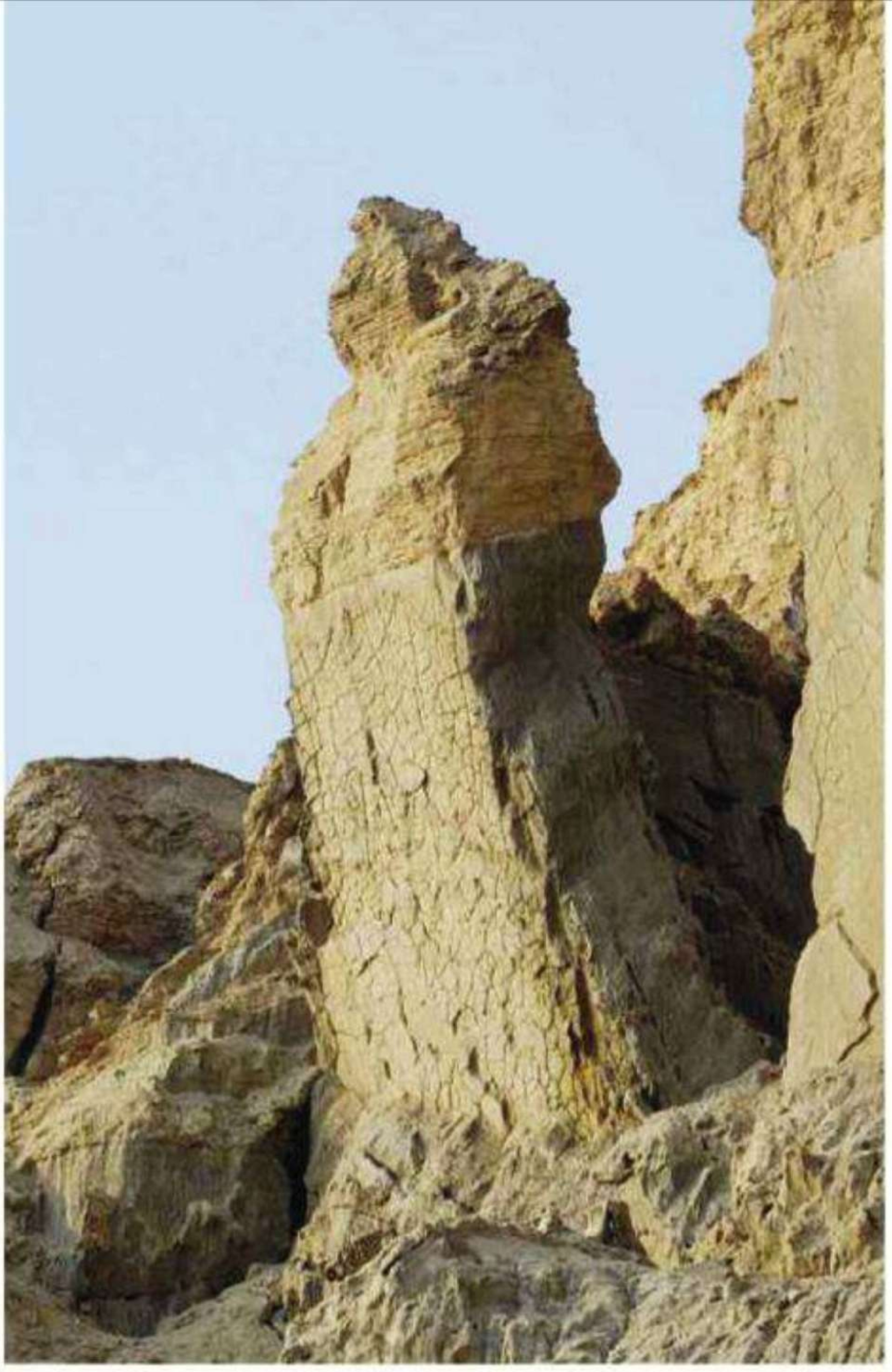
Hebrew-reading Jews realise just how strange are these verses detailing Moses's death. It is not possible to see, with normal human vision, the entire land of *Eretz Yishrael* that Moses was shown, even from the highest point in the Mountains of Moab. Rashi – the acronym for Rabbi Sholomo Yitzchaki (1040–1174 CE) – a famous commentator on the *Torah* and *Talmud* says: "*It was more than a mere physical glance, GOD prophetically showed Moses every part of the land and the entire panorama of Jewish history that occurred at the places mentioned in the passage, the entire Eretz Israel, in its prosperity and under the oppression of future conquerors.*"

The *Targum Yonasan*, a commentary ascribed to Yonason ben Uziel (1st c. BCE) says: "HE [GOD] showed him all the strong ones of the land", its future leaders throughout history. Rashi and other sages teach: "*Read this phrase not as 'the last [western] sea' but as 'the last day' [because] GOD showed Moses all that would happen to Israel in the future until the last day when the dead will live again.*" Both are possible renditions in Hebrew.

Astonishingly, the passage says that God killed Moses. Rashi states: "*Moses died by the Divine Kiss.*"[1] The very next verse is equally as extraordinary, for it seems to say that God buried Moses. However, another authoritative opinion from the Talmud says that Moses *buried himself*. Because the word *oto / ata* is reflexive – an action that the subject performs on himself – the 'he' here should more accurately be translated as 'himself', as is found in Numbers 6:13 and Leviticus 22:16.

Here is the greatest figure in the Hebrew Bible dying in a strange fashion and being buried alone in some mystical way without death rites. Death rites and a proper burial are vitally important rituals in the life of a Jew. Lastly, how can it be that this giant of Jewish history has no gravesite? What is this text trying to say? The *Talmud*, in an almost throwaway line, says that Moses's grave was one of the 10 things created during twilight on the eve of the first Sabbath of Creation (*Avos* 5:6). Thus the 'gravesite' was a 'special' creation. The place of burial "opposite Beth-pe'or" is also very curious; more on Beth-pe'or later…

GETTY IMAGES / DAVID SILVERMAN



CITIES OF THE PLAIN

The Dead Sea and its environs must be one of the strangest places on the planet. In the south, above the 'sea' shore, there is the aptly named 'Lot's wife', a pillar of rock salt that really does look like a middle-aged woman with an expression of fear and anguish, as if caught frozen in mid-scream. For Biblical illiterates, this is a reference to a story found at Genesis 19:24–26, "*Now GOD caused sulphur and fire to rain upon Sodom and Gomorrah, from GOD, out of heaven. HE overturned these cities and the entire plain, with all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the soil. His [Lot's] wife peered behind him and she became a pillar of salt.*"

Below this simulacrum, down on the plain, the geological formations, and the topography, look very like ruined towns with walls, streets, towers and so on. From a distance, you might well think they were the remains of towns that had suffered some kind of cataclysmic event.

The Dead Sea is now shallower than it has ever been, due primarily to over-exploitation of the minerals in the southern 'pan' of the sea by both Israel and Jordan. There were supposedly more settlements here than just Sodom and Gomorrah, but so far no significant archæological findings have been made in the traditional area of the 'cities of the plain'. Not surprising really, as any remains would be buried beneath metres of salt. Still, the area is littered with these salt blocks (we're not talking 'table salt' here, but rather concrete-hard rock mineral salts).

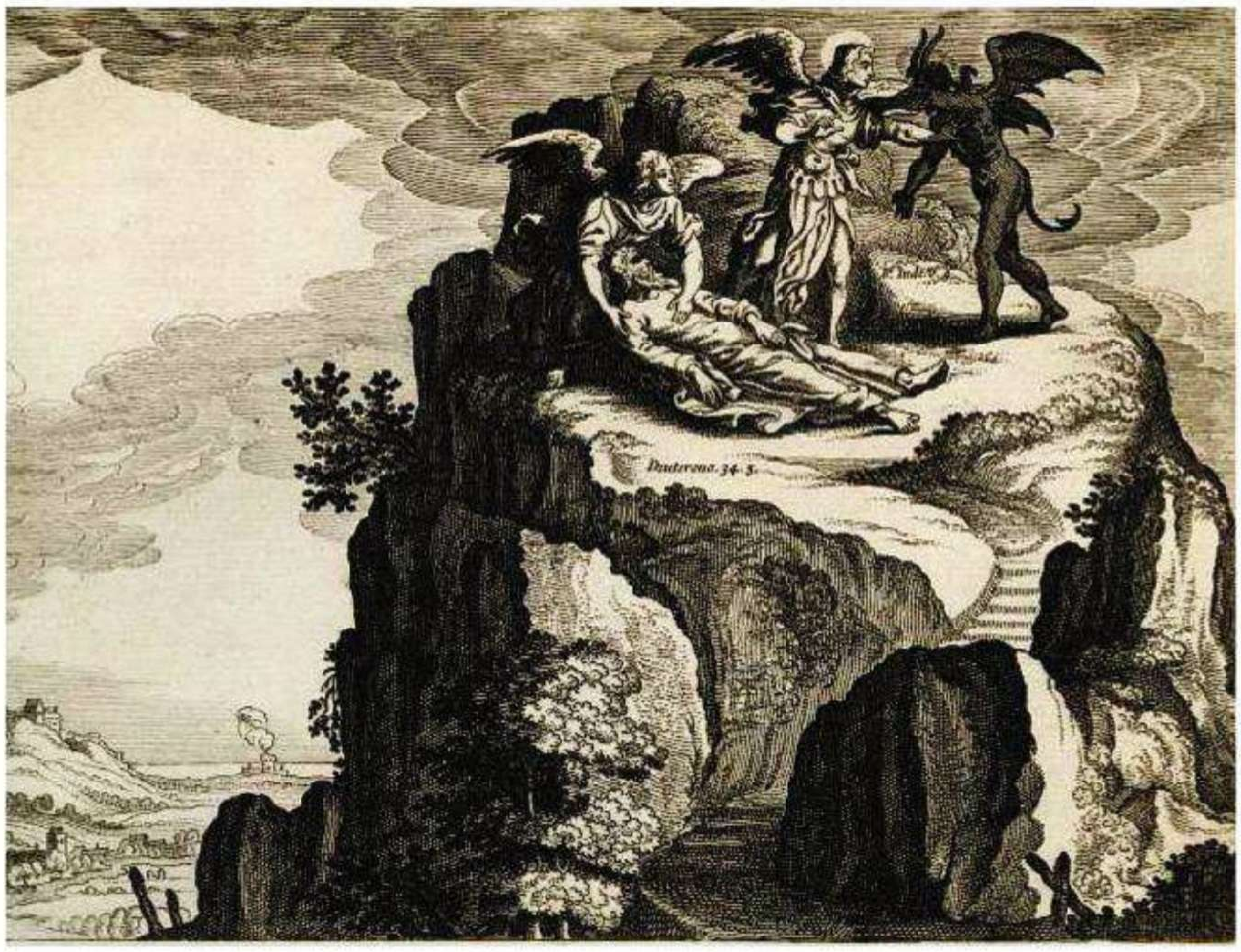
Could it be that it was the topography that gave force to these stories? Obviously, the topography existed before the stories were told – that's the hint in the *Talmud* about Moses's grave being part of primordial creation – and later written down to became part of the holiest section of the Jewish Scriptures, the *Torah*, otherwise known as the 'Five Books of Moses' (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).

Dare I even say that the topography and the geologically cataclysmic events of the region – the Dead Sea is essentially a large puddle in the lowest point of the Jordan Rift Valley, the lowest place on Earth, a deep wound and scar on the planet – created the stories? It is a place stinking of sulphur and poisonous gases, a place of earthquake activity and, in the not so distant past, great volcanic activity. Although people love to bathe in the Dead Sea and float on its surface, as the water is so buoyant, there are signs all the way along the shore warning that it is dangerous to submerge oneself, and that drinking the water can kill.

MASADA AND THE FACE OF HEROD

Before leaving the Dead Sea area, I came across another amazing simulacrum, one that, as far as I'm aware, no one else has recognised… maybe a fortean first? Just south from En Gedi sits an imposing mesa or butte, a little inland from the western shore. This is a very creepy and solemn place. Known as 'Masada', it's a natural fortress with a long and bloody history. 'King' Herod (the Great, king from 37–4 BCE) built a palace-fortress here, as a bolthole to get away from the two things he most feared. One was his Jewish subjects (who passionately hated him); the other was a well-known woman with great influence – Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, who made no secret of the fact that she wanted Mark Anthony, her lover and one of the rulers of the Roman world, to take Herod's kingdom. According to Josephus, she begged him "to destroy Herod… requesting the transfer to herself of Judea."

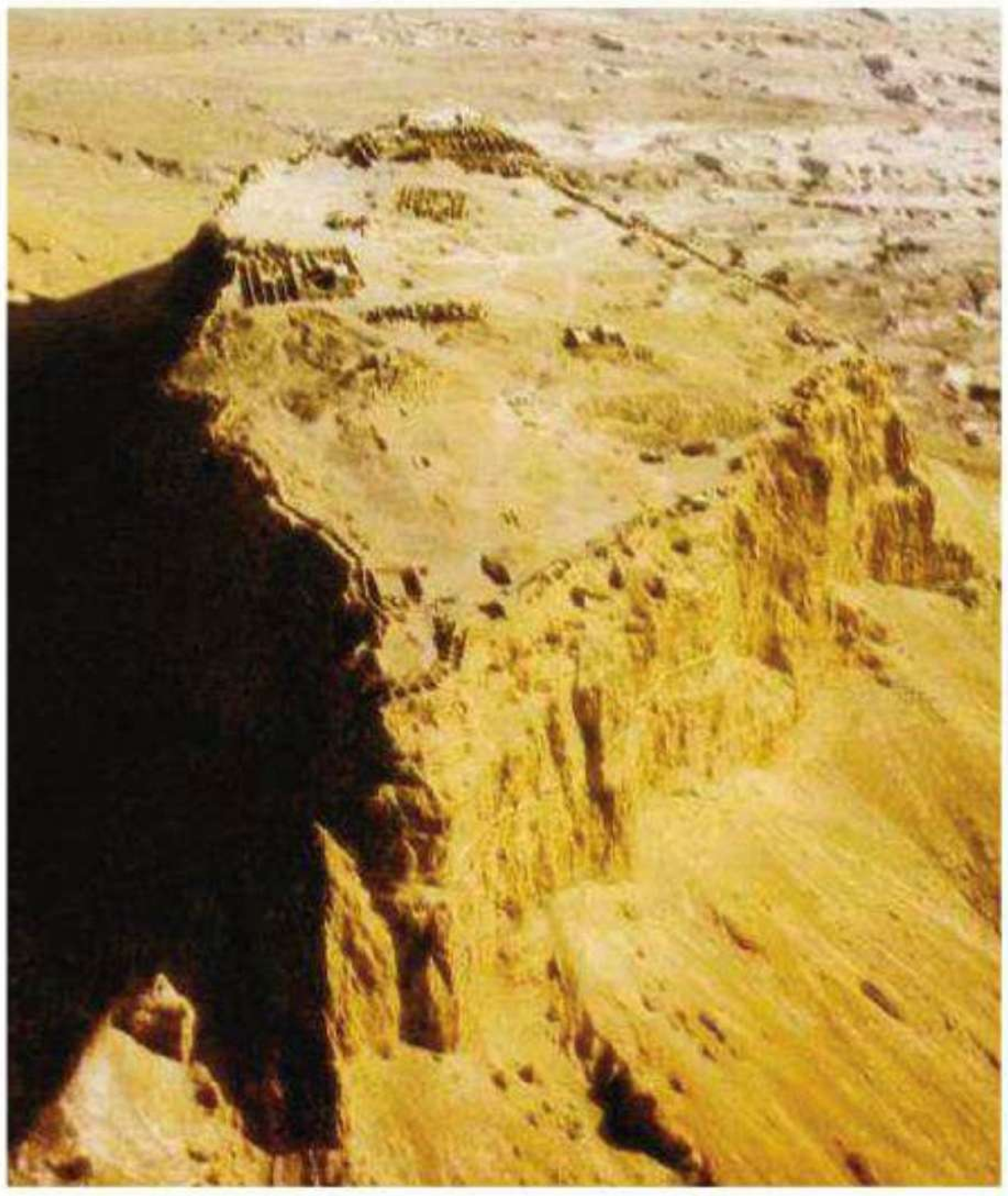
Herod knew the place well, as he'd hidden out at Masada in 40 BCE with his household and some 800 followers after


Deuterons. 34. 5.

ALAMY / THE ART ARCHIVE

TOP: The pillar near the Dead Sea known as "Lot's wife". **ABOVE:** The death of Moses at the top of Mount Pisgah, with the Archangel Michael holding Satan back from the body.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / KHALIL MAZRAAWI



RICHARD SEARY

ABOVE: The shore of the Dead Sea.

LEFT: The simulacrum of Herod revealed when looking down on Masada.

the Jews, with Parthian help, liberated Jerusalem and drove out the Romans and their puppet. Herod then escaped to Rome, leaving his brother in charge at Masada. He returned in 37 BCE with two war-experienced Roman legions, recaptured Jerusalem, and executed the rightful king Antigonus before declaring himself 'king' of Judea. By backing Octavian against Anthony and Cleopatra in the Roman civil war, Herod's position became unassailable when, with his help, the Egyptian alliance was defeated in 30 BCE and Octavian became sole emperor (known to history as 'Augustus').

Herod had no need of Masada as a bolthole after that, but he visited it often and, soon after 30 BCE, he ordered massive building projects on its flat top. Although history remembers Herod as a builder of cities throughout his kingdom – Cæsarea on the Mediterranean being the best known – it was nothing compared to what he built on Masada. The most spectacular buildings – palaces, baths, fortifications, giant cisterns, a three-tiered 'hanging' palace, store-houses, colonnades, mosaics, frescoes and wall-paintings, swimming pools, spas with hot and cold pools, aqueducts and more – were erected, serviced and maintained on the top of this stinking hot, isolated butte in the middle of nowhere.

Nowadays, no doubt, Herod would be diagnosed as a narcissistic sociopath with bipolar disorder and a raft of other psychiatric conditions – but that doesn't explain his fascination with Masada. In today's money, Herod spent billions of dollars with a workforce that must have numbered in the thousands, if not tens of thousands.

Masada takes on the shape of a giant head with a cloth crown

It's not until you climb behind and slightly above Masada and look down upon it from the south, from the Judean plateau, that a resolution to this mystery suggests itself. Morning is the best time, because of the shadows; Masada then takes on the simulacrum of a giant head wearing the Egyptian-styled cloth 'crown' and what could be a perfume cone at the top of the head. Yes, it's the old tyrant-devil himself!

The only representations of Herodian family features in existence are coins from the reign of Herod's son, Herod Philip II (4 BCE – 34 CE), who broke with the Jewish tradition of not having images on Judean coins. Instead, he had his own and the current emperor's profiles on his coinage. The resemblance between his profile and the Masada simulacrum is uncanny. When Herod first saw Masada from above, it would have been like looking into a mirror, seeing himself in royal headdress, facing westward. The location of his major buildings adds to the illusion. Herod was glorifying himself. In his mind it could have been confirmation that he was Godly, divinely appointed to rule. In reality, Herod was far more pagan and superstitious than Jewish.

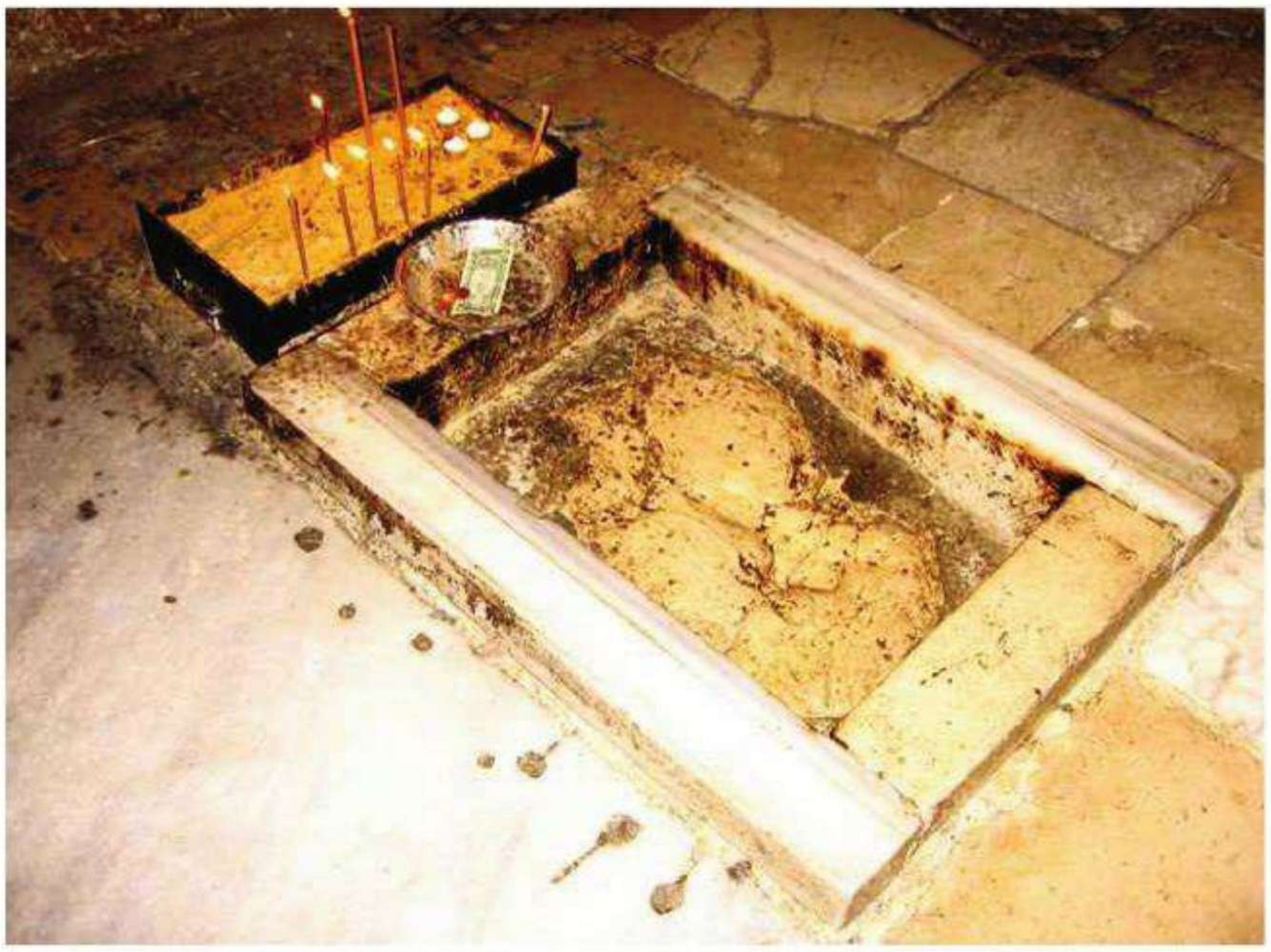
The story of Masada doesn't finish with Herod. About 100 years later, a thousand Zealots under the leadership of Eleazar ben Ya'ir escaped the carnage of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem by Roman general (and future Emperor) Titus. The Zealots intended to continue the fight against Rome in what became called the First Roman-Jewish War (66 – 73 CE). The Zealots took Masada in 66 and held onto it until 73. The fate of the Zealot defenders at Masada still sends chills down the spine.

Zealots were extreme 'orthodox' Jews who hated all things pagan and non-Jewish. They despised the Herodians and their whole dynasty, and were not averse to killing fellow Jews if they were Roman collaborators. During their occupation of Masada, the Zealots deliberately destroyed much of Herod's palaces and their pagan decorations and paintings. They used their base at Masada to launch guerrilla attacks on Roman garrisons, towns and columns. The Herod simulacrum would have made them very angry indeed.

Eventually, Rome appointed an experienced general, Flavius Silva, as procurator of Judea, with orders to destroy this last stronghold of Jewish resistance. The rest of the country had been subdued for years.

The Romans threw some 25,000 troops and prisoner-of-war slaves against the now 960 Zealot men, women and children. Eventually the Romans built a giant ramp – which still exists – up to the walls of Masada. The night before the Romans' final attack, the Zealots committed mass suicide rather then suffer defeat by overwhelming Roman forces. After burying their holy books and setting fire to all personal possessions (but leaving food stores), they killed each other by lots. With the exception of two women and five children who hid themselves, all the Romans found were 953 corpses of men, women and children.

The Romans had never before come across this and, in the words of Josephus, "*far, however, from exulting in the triumph of joy that might have been expected from enemies, they united to admire the steady virtue and dignity of mind with which the Jews had been inspired, and wondered at that generous contempt of death by which such numbers had been bound in one solemn compact.*" The strain of Jewish fundamentalism that Masada inspired is with us to this day; it was originally a reaction to Herodian attempts to Romanise and/or Hellenise Jews. It is a sobering thought that nowadays certain elements of the Israeli Defence Forces make bonfire oaths on Masada, at night, to fight to the last man and woman and the last bullet. All this from a rock that looks like Herod!



ADRIATIKUS / CC ATTRIBUTION-SHARE ALIKE 3

SIMULACRA AND FAITH

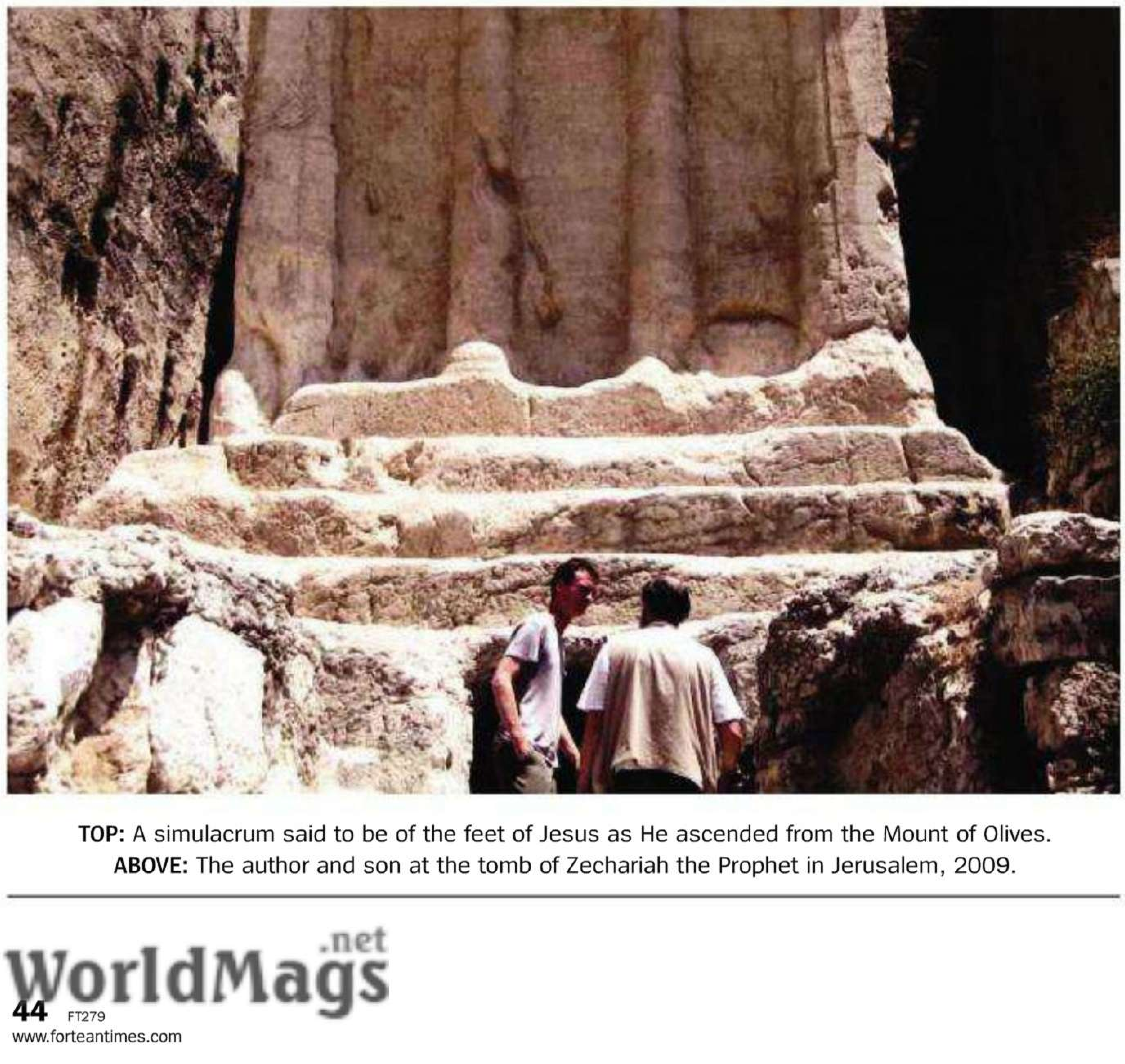
I didn't find many simulacra in Jerusalem, but on the top of Mount of Olives – just behind our hotel in Palestinian East Jerusalem – there is a 12th-century Crusader-built dome over a rock that purports to be the spot where Jesus ascended in Heaven. Under the dome is a bordered piece of smooth stone, perhaps marble, with a simulacrum of a pair of feet, claimed by some Christians to be the marks left by Jesus when he ascended.

The 'footprints' are said to be those of the ascended Jesus

This site is under the control of the Muslim religious authorities and Christians are only allowed to worship there once a year. Nevertheless, Christian religious tourists visit the site every day by the busload. After paying the Muslim 'gatekeepers', the pilgrims often leave cash offerings on the simulacra; these are scooped up by the 'caretakers' once the pilgrims have gone. I've measured the simulacra and it seems that Jesus must have had two very large, different sized, club feet. Or maybe it was just his ascension footwear? The dome is surrounded by what is claimed to be the remains of a Crusader church, but it looked pretty Roman to me. It's on a great site with views over all Jerusalem, as the Mount of Olives is higher then Temple Mount.

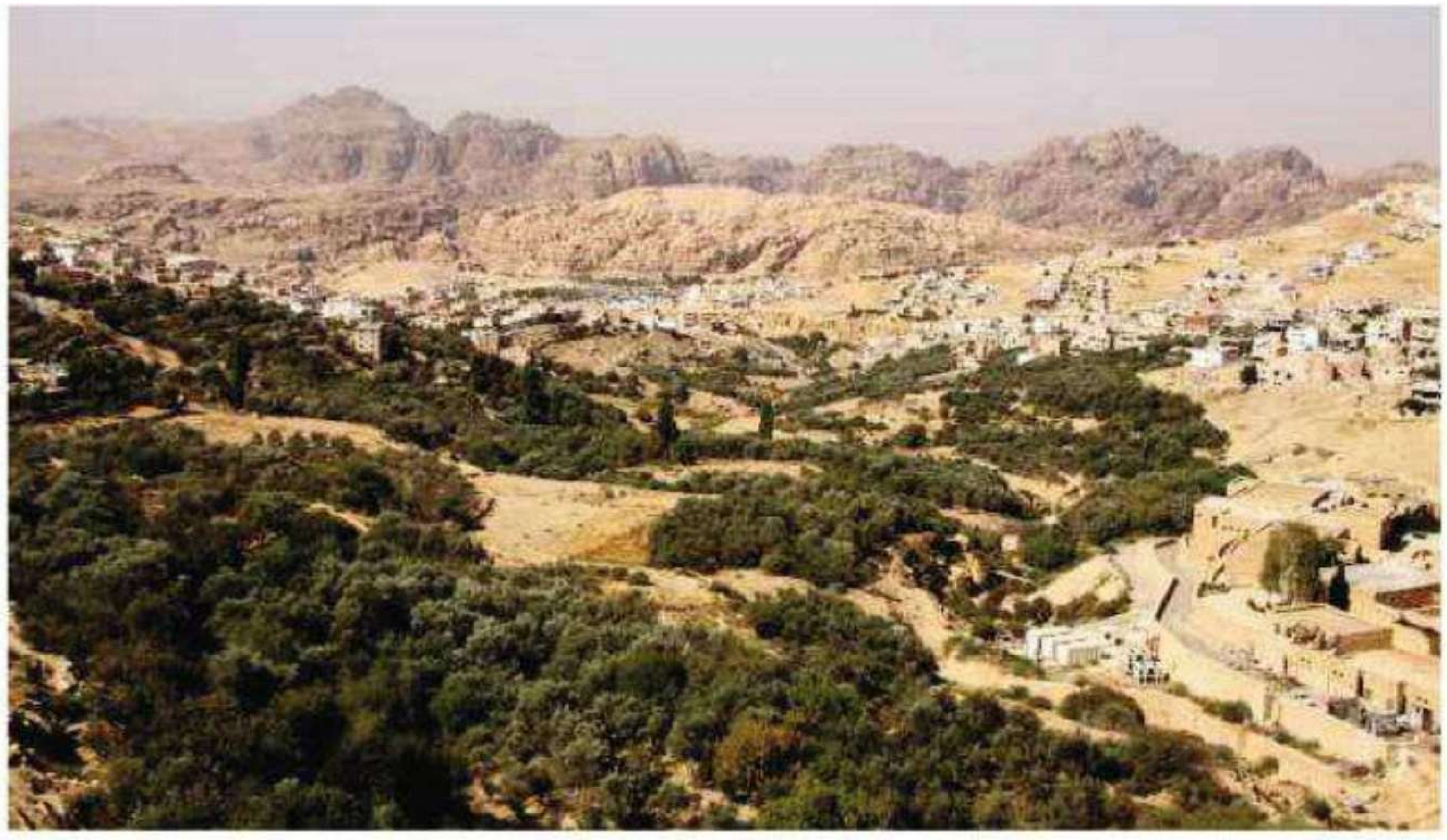
While simulacra are rare in Jerusalem and its environs, for ley lovers the Holy City is the mother lode. On an alignment running from east to west through the Dome of the Ascension, sacred to Christians, it passes over the prophet Zechariah's tomb (c.500 BCE) and the tomb of Absalom, King David's son, (c.950 BCE); past the Crusader tomb-church of the Virgin Mary; past the Garden of Gethsemane; over Mount Moriah (where Jacob encountered God and had a vision of the Ladder to Heaven with angels ascending and descending); over the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock (the third most holy place in Islam); over the holiest place in Judaism, the Kotel ('Wailing' or Western Wall, c.1st century BCE, covering even earlier walls from Solomon's time); past the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the holiest place in Christendom; past the Herod family tomb; over the US Consulate (?); over the Great Synagogue of Israel; over the modern Knesset (Israel's Parliament) and beyond. All this is within a distance of about 4km (approximately 2½ miles).

What is quite fascinating is the number of sites that have celestial and holy entities ascending and descending between Earth and Heaven along this ley: Jesus, up and down from the Mount of Olives; Mohammad on his magic flying horse, going up and down from the Al Aqsa mosque (according to Muslims, Jesus also uses this route); Jacob's Ladder to Heaven with angels going up and down on Mount



RICHARD SEARY

TOP: A simulacrum said to be of the feet of Jesus as He ascended from the Mount of Olives.
ABOVE: The author and son at the tomb of Zechariah the Prophet in Jerusalem, 2009.



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ABOVE: Wadi Musa Valley, thought to be the location of Beth Pe'or.

Moriah; the Virgin Mary ascending (bodily) and sending her angelic messengers and herself back to Earth (according to Catholic beliefs); and the prayers of the Jewish faithful ascending to Heaven from the Kotel and returning as blessings, sometimes in angelic forms. No wonder the Israeli Air Force has declared the air space over Jerusalem a no-fly zone!

At the risk of being burnt as a heretic by fundamentalist Jews, Muslims and Christians, I postulate that indeed, simulacra and the topography of the region have had a major influence of the foundations of the three monotheistic faiths which come out of Israel: Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Judaism and Christianity physically, Islam theologically). The recognition of a simulacrum is basically a subjective action, whereas forms in the landscape are an objective reality.

Having worked with Australian Aboriginal (tribal) people, I know they 'read', in every landform, river, waterhole, rock and clump of trees, a story left behind by the 'Dreamtime' ancestors. So it might have been in the Jewish Dreamtime; the time of the Creation, pre- and post-Flood, and in the stories of the Patriarchs. I don't see a problem with accepting this; even though I am an observant Jew, it doesn't mean I've put my mind on hold.

Before being called Jews, they were Israelites; before Israelites they were Hebrews; before Hebrews they were the 'descendents of Abraham'. The line continues to the present day, and I believe that the topography of the Jewish homeland has become so deeply engrained in the culture and spiritual schema of Judaism that it also sees a continuum in Christianity and Islam. Hundreds of verses in the Jewish Scriptures, *Talmud* and *Midrash* describe the landforms; the majority of Psalms have references to 'holy places', as do the stories of the prophets and leaders of Israel in various eras. Perhaps it's the human condition and not related to any cultural factors. The culture may determine what is seen, but the act of 'seeing' is universal.

But now comes the big dichotomy: in Judaism (as in Islam) 'images' are totally forbidden and the prohibition is absolute. The Second Commandment (Exodus 20:3–6 & Deuteronomy 5:7–9) is explicit, though badly translated in most English, Christian versions. Here is the Jewish translation: "*You shall not recognise the gods of others in MY PRESENCE. You shall not make yourself a carved image nor any likeness of that which is in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the water beneath the earth. You shall not prostrate yourself to them nor worship them, for I AM HASHEM, your God – a jealous God.*" (Exodus 20:3–5a)

You will notice that there is no reference to simulacra here. It's all about *making* a god or giving recognition to the gods of others (non-Jews, or more specifically, non-HASHEM worshippers). Rabbi Nosson Scherman's commentary on these verses (*The Chumash*, Mesorah Publishing, Stone Edition, New York, 2008) is very instructive: "*Prohibition of Idolatry – This commandment comprises four separate injunctions: a) It is forbidden to believe in idols; b) It is forbidden to make or possess them; c) It is forbidden to worship them through any of the four forms of Divine service* [ie. prostration, animal slaughter, offerings or libations, upon an altar]*; and d) It is forbidden to worship an idol by a means which is unique to it, even if such a method is not used for other deities, and even if the service would be considered disrespectful in any other context, eg. the idol Pe'or was worshipped through public defecation, and the believers in Merkulis (Mercury) worshipped it by throwing stones at it. If performed before other idols, such acts would be permitted expressions of contempt. But to the worshippers of Pe'or and Merkulis they are the prescribed forms of worship, and are therefore forbidden to be performed before those idols.*"

There's that Pe'or reference again. Pe'or is the name of a Canaanite/Midianite god which gave its name to a region. The Beth-Pe'or (*House* or *Place of Pe'or*) is about 12 miles (19km) southeast of Jericho – about where I noticed the simulacrum of the old man. In classical or Biblical Hebrew, the word *Pe'or* means 'gap' or 'hole' and comes from the prime root *pau'ar* meaning 'open [wide]' or 'to yawn'. However, there are a lot of secondary and related meanings, including 'to shit', 'anus', 'buggery', 'anal sex', 'to scream', 'to cry', etc. I think you're getting the picture of how the Israelite men were enticed and seduced by "the daughters of Moab" and the Midianite women (more explicit details can be found in the Babylonian Talmud – *Sanhedrin* 106a).

Out of the sexual immorality and the anal orgies that happened at Pe'or, some 24,000 Israelites died of a rather strange plague. As far as I know, this is the first reference in any ancient literature to a sexually transmitted 'plague' or pandemic. For a cross-cultural, cross-lingual fortean fix, all this happened when "Israel settled in the Shittim…" (*Bamidbar* / Numbers 25:1)

The Hebrew scriptures are full of semiotics – the 'science of signs'. Wordplay, puns and euphemisms are often found to be semiotics in 'holy' literatures and are the literary equivalent of simulacra in nature. These literary simulacra are definitely part of the foundations of Jewish, Christian and Islamic faiths. A simulacrum is not an idol, but it can become one, as we often see in the pages of *FT* with the 'faithful' worshipping spontaneous images from tree-rings and stalactites to Virgin Mary pancakes. No wonder this old Jewish scholar loves delving into the scrolls, languages and landscape of his religious and cultural ancestry.

NOTES

1 The literal is *al-phi YHVH* (by mouth [of] YHVH). Rashi and some Talmud scholars say "died by the Divine Kiss". The word 'kiss' is generally *naw'shaq* having a prime meaning 'to attach', 'fasten up' as in mouths joined, can also mean 'to equip with weapons', 'armed men', 'rule', 'kiss', 'that touched', and when pronounced as naw'saq means 'to catch [fire], 'kindle', burn'. Throughout the Moses narrative, he is called '*eesh ha-elohim*' (man [of] the God), but in death he gets called, for the first time, '*ebed-YHVH*' (slave / worker / servant [of] YHVH). The term has always been seen as an elevation in rank. The death-of-Moses text has been a point of contention for nearly 3,000 years and I don't think I can shed any further light on it. The idea of ascending or translating is alien to the Jewish / Hebrew texts and psyche – in fact, uniquely among religions, Judaism is almost completely silent on anything to do with 'after-life'. There's even a Talmudic prohibition of speculation on 'the four things': what was before birth; what happens after death; what is above; and what is below.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Since retiring from work with Australian Indigenous people, **RICHARD SEARY** has been working on a new translation and linguistic commentary featuring the semiotics of the *Tanakh*, and on his autobiography. He has been a stalwart of *FT* since 1979, when he printed issues, and has since contributed articles on subjects as diverse as out-of-place animals, werewolves, the Dead Sea Scrolls, ghosts and fish-man, over the last 25 years.

Treasures of Heaven

DAVID V BARRETT visits the British Museum's 'Treasures of Heaven' exhibition, where he finds not just the purported mortal remains of saints and nails from the Crown of Thorns, but a dazzling display of mediæval craftsmanship.

There's a lovely story about a pious pilgrim who is shown a skull of John the Baptist, and mentions he saw a different skull of John the Baptist in another church the previous day.

"Ah well, 'tis simple," says the priest. "Sure and that other skull was from when he was just a boy; but ours, he was a full-grown man."

I decide not to tell this story to Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster and head of the Catholic Church in Britain, when I meet him at a private preview for the Treasures of Heaven exhibition in the glorious old Reading Room at the British Museum. He probably knows it anyway. But I do ask him if it's possible that some of the relics in the exhibition – which include a piece of the True Cross, three separate thorns from the Crown of Thorns and a drop of the Virgin Mary's breast milk, amongst all the bits of bones of saints – might, just perhaps, not be as historically legitimate as their mediæval champions claimed; and if so, then what is their value in the 21st century?

"It's perfectly clear that relics are a very important part of the expression of religious faith as well as of cultural importance in the way that people cling to a souvenir from a person they've loved or a place that they've been to," he tells me. "And what that conveys is the connecting of this moment with the treasured moment of the past. And if that connection is made through an object which maybe forensically won't stand up to the test, that's of secondary importance to the spiritual and emotive power that the object can contain, and does contain."

So it doesn't matter if the relics aren't what they purport to be? Sister Wendy Beckett had a refreshing attitude when Andrew Graham-Dixon asked her much the same question in a recent BBC4 documentary on relics: "I think with these very early saints it's almost impossible that they are the real bones, but they stand in for the real bones."

> *"The setting of the relic is as eloquent as the relic itself"*

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Why are saints' bones important anyway? The stunningly beautiful catalogue of the exhibition explains that although Thomas Aquinas "doubted that there was a special light in mortal remains", popular belief was that "the soul in heaven remains in contact with the earthly body which shall renew itself at the Resurrection", so the saint's body is filled with "sacred power".[1]

There are several levels of importance when dealing with relics. First-class relics are parts of a saint's body; second-class are things which the saint wore or touched; third- and fourth-class relics are objects deliberately touched by first- or second-class relics respectively with the intention of creating a relic.[2] Most of the relics in the exhibition are first-class: the purported bones of saints.

Every Catholic altar should contain a relic of a martyr or other saint within it; ideally, this should be the saint the church is dedicated to, but in practice this is rarely possible and when the altar is dedicated the Vatican sends the church a relic of another saint. They take the practice seriously.

"Such relics should be of a size sufficient for them to be recognised as parts of human bodies. Hence excessively small relics of one or more saints must not be placed beneath the altar.

"The greatest care must be taken to determine whether the relics in question are authentic. It is better for an altar to be dedicated without relics than to have relics of doubtful authenticity placed beneath it."[3]

The authenticity of a relic, like an antique, depends a lot on its documented history, and the further back you can go the better. Whether or not *any* of the fragments of the True Cross are really genuine, James Robinson, curator of the exhibition, says of the reliquary of the early 12th-century True Cross from Zwiefalten in Germany: "It has a provenance which goes right back to the First Crusade, so we're fairly secure that that was collected in Jerusalem from the relic that was believed to have been discovered by St Helena. So it's a really strong connection to that very early relic-collecting period of the fourth century."

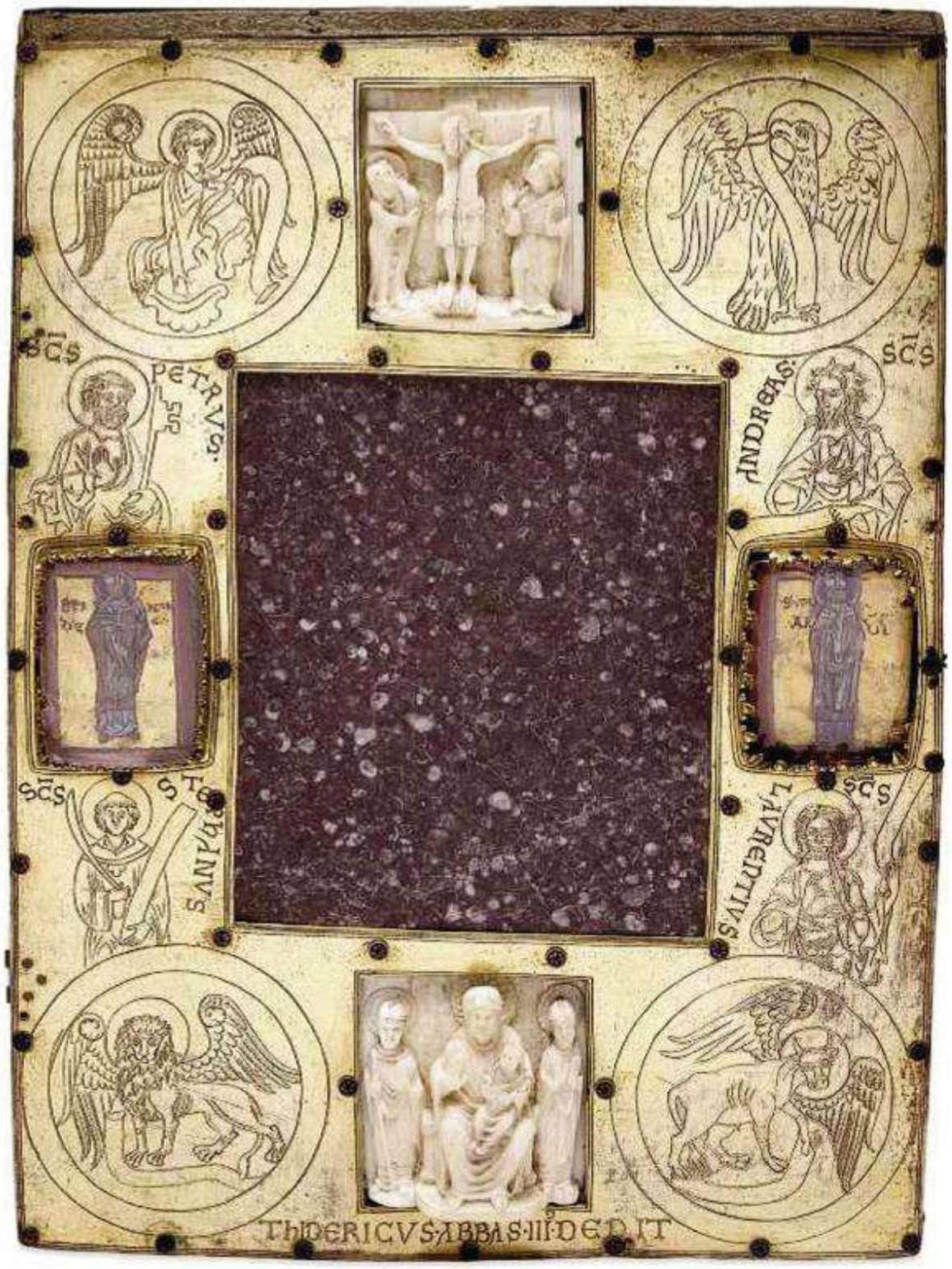
Christians believe that Jesus ascended bodily to heaven, so most of his own relics are objects associated with his Passion, though again, their authenticity is obviously questionable. But these relics of Christ are "testaments to his incarnation; that's the importance of them", Robinson tells me. The exhibition doesn't contain any of the dozen or more foreskins of Jesus once littering Europe, or his umbilical cord – though it does have the

LEFT: Unknown female saint.

FACING, TOP LEFT: German portable altar, 1190–1200.

FACING, BOTTOM LEFT: Panel of the triumphant Christ from St Oda Reliquary, Mosan, Belgium, 12th–13th century.

FACING, RIGHT: Arm reliquary of the Apostle, German, c. 1190. (© Cleveland Museum of Art)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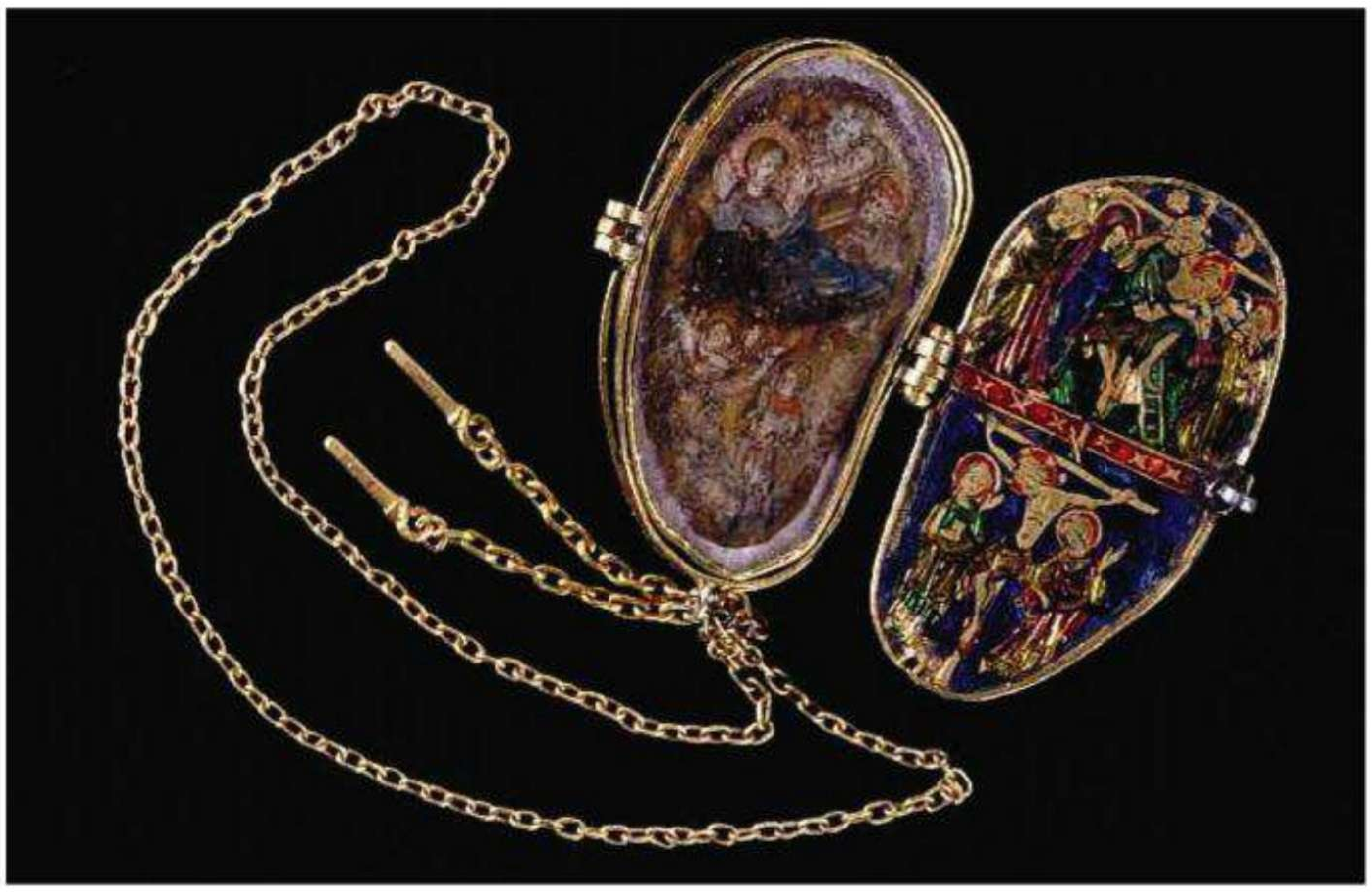


DAVID BARRETT

ABOVE LEFT: Reliquary pendant from the Holy Thorn, Paris, c.1340. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Relic of the foot of Saint Blaise. **BELOW**: Mandylion (presentation of Christ), from the 13th century.

beautifully delicate reliquary, a silver gilt Virgin and Child from 1407, that once held it.

The glory of this exhibition, of course, isn't in the bits of bone or other relics; it's in the gorgeous reliquaries that hold them. Here is richness galore: gold, silver, precious jewels adorning beautifully crafted crosses, caskets, heads, arms and even feet – the last three containing bones of those body parts. These reliquaries are designed to reflect the glory of the saints, and so of God.

"The setting of the relic is as eloquent as the relic itself," says Archbishop Nichols. "If you look at a lot of these reliquaries, you don't actually see the relic. The relic is, as it were, at the end of an inner journey. So what they're looking for is the viewer to really enter their own soul to understand how they enter into the value of the treasure of the relic that is before them. So it's a spiritual dialogue that takes place between this object and the person. That's why they're called 'Treasures of Heaven', because it is through the spiritual that our hearts are raised to heaven."

The Cross of St Nikomedes of Borghorst in Germany is one of James Robinson's favourites. "This is the most astonishing thing," he says. "It's incredible. I think the gold is almost too brilliant. When you look at pure gold like that you really understand something about the nature of the material. Compared to the silver gilt next to it, that's a much cooler light, but the gold has this amazing warmth."

The cross, about 16 inches by 11 (41 x 28cm), dates from around 1050 and contains two rock crystal flasks which hold numerous relics, wrapped in red silk. These include fragments of "the sponge of the Lord; of the bed of Mary, Mother of God; of the body of St Peter the Apostle" and several other saints, and "of the shoulder of St Symeon".

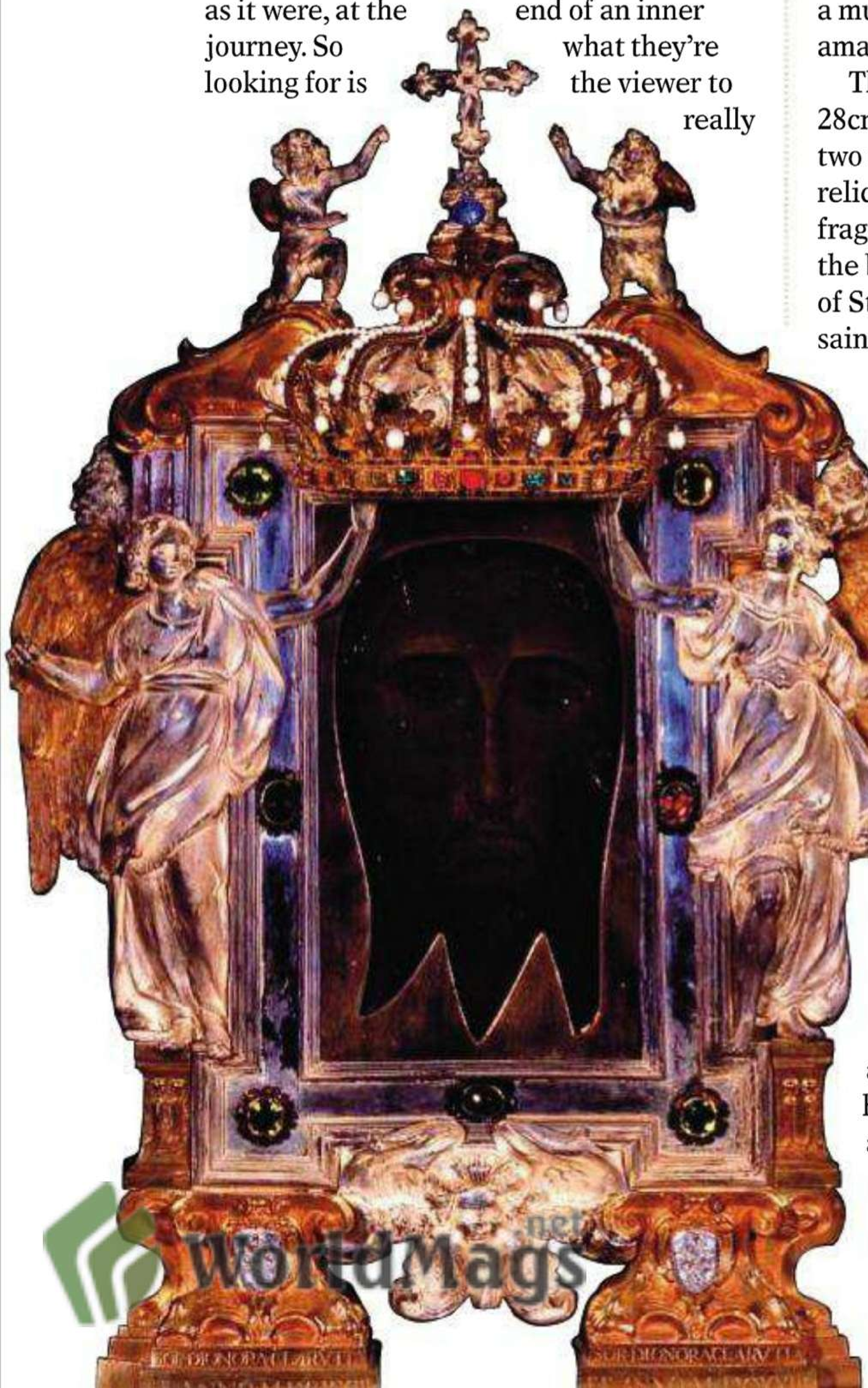
One of my own favourites is a beautiful tiny French pendant from around 1340, just 1½ x 1in (4 x 2.65 cm). On the outside is a rich purple amethyst, while inside are exquisitely enamelled scenes including the Nativity, the Virgin and Child enthroned and the Crucifixion. A painted piece of vellum covered by glass conceals a Holy Thorn.

One of the rarest items in the exhibition is the Mandylion, the Face of Christ. According to one 4th century story, Jesus dried his face on a towel, imprinting his image on it. For variations of the legend, see "Christ's portrait" [**FT276:26–27**]. As an acheropite, an image "not made with hands", this became the most venerated icon in Byzantium, and is seen as a predecessor of the Shroud of Turin. The original Mandylion of Edessa was taken to Constantinople in 944 then lost in the sack of that city in 1204.

The Mandylion in the exhibition, on loan from the Vatican, is one of two dating to around the 13th century. The dark and faded cloth, with the image still visible, is set within a rather gaudy 17th-century mount. Despite it not being the original, James Robinson is enthusiastic about it.

"One of the mysterious aspects of this relic, or this icon of Christ, is that we're not entirely sure what the nature of it is," he tells me. "According to mediæval tradition and belief, the Mandylion could operate almost like a printing block, so that if you placed another piece of cloth on top of it, it would leave an impression on it." So, in pious belief, this Mandylion could be a miraculous fourth-class relic of Christ, imprinted with his image by being touched to the cloth on which he dried his face. Alternatively, to quote Joe Nickell of the Committee for Skeptical Enquiry, it could be "type AB tempura paint".[4]

But whatever your beliefs, Treasures of Heaven is a stunning exhibition of mediæval religious craftsmanship.



NOTES

1 Bagnoli, Klein, Mann, Robinson (eds): *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, British Museum Press 2011:20.

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3 *Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), 1978: Para II 5a,b.

4 Nickell, *op.cit.* 2007:178.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

DAVID BARRETT is a frequent *FT* contributor. He writes, and speaks frequently on TV and radio, on alternative religions and secret societies. His books include *The New Believers* and *A Brief History of Secret Societies*.

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The Secret Gospel of Mark

ANDREW PHILLIP SMITH attempts to untangle the web of mysteries around what has come to be known as the Secret Gospel of Mark. Do the hints contained in a long-forgotten letter by a Church Father suggest Jesus performed homosexual rituals? Or is the letter itself a forgery perpetrated over a lifetime by a brilliant academic?

In 1958, Morton Smith, an American academic, travelled to Israel to catalogue the manuscripts in the library of the ancient Mar Saba monastery in the desert outside Jerusalem. He had stayed there previously in 1941, as a student at Jerusalem University, travelling by donkey to the isolated monastery, which existed as it had done for centuries. There had been no electricity and Smith was moved and impressed by the atmospheric, candle-lit vigils, which went on for hours, occupying the greater part of the monastic day. But he insisted, "[F]or the monks it was truth; for me it was poetry; their practice was based on faith, mine on a willing suspension of disbelief."

On his second visit to Mar Saba, Smith was less enamoured of the place; its mystery had been dispersed by electric light and the population of monks had dwindled. He took a few manuscripts a day from the tower library back to his tiny cell to assess and describe them. Though he wasn't expecting much (the more valuable and interesting manuscripts had previously been transferred to Jerusalem), he discovered something written into the flyleaves at the back of an early printed edition of the writings of the church father St Ignatius – a previously unknown letter of Clement of Alexandria, in a 17th-century Greek script. Clement was a late second-century church father, an orthodox Christian instrumental in importing the Greek philosophical tradition into Christianity.

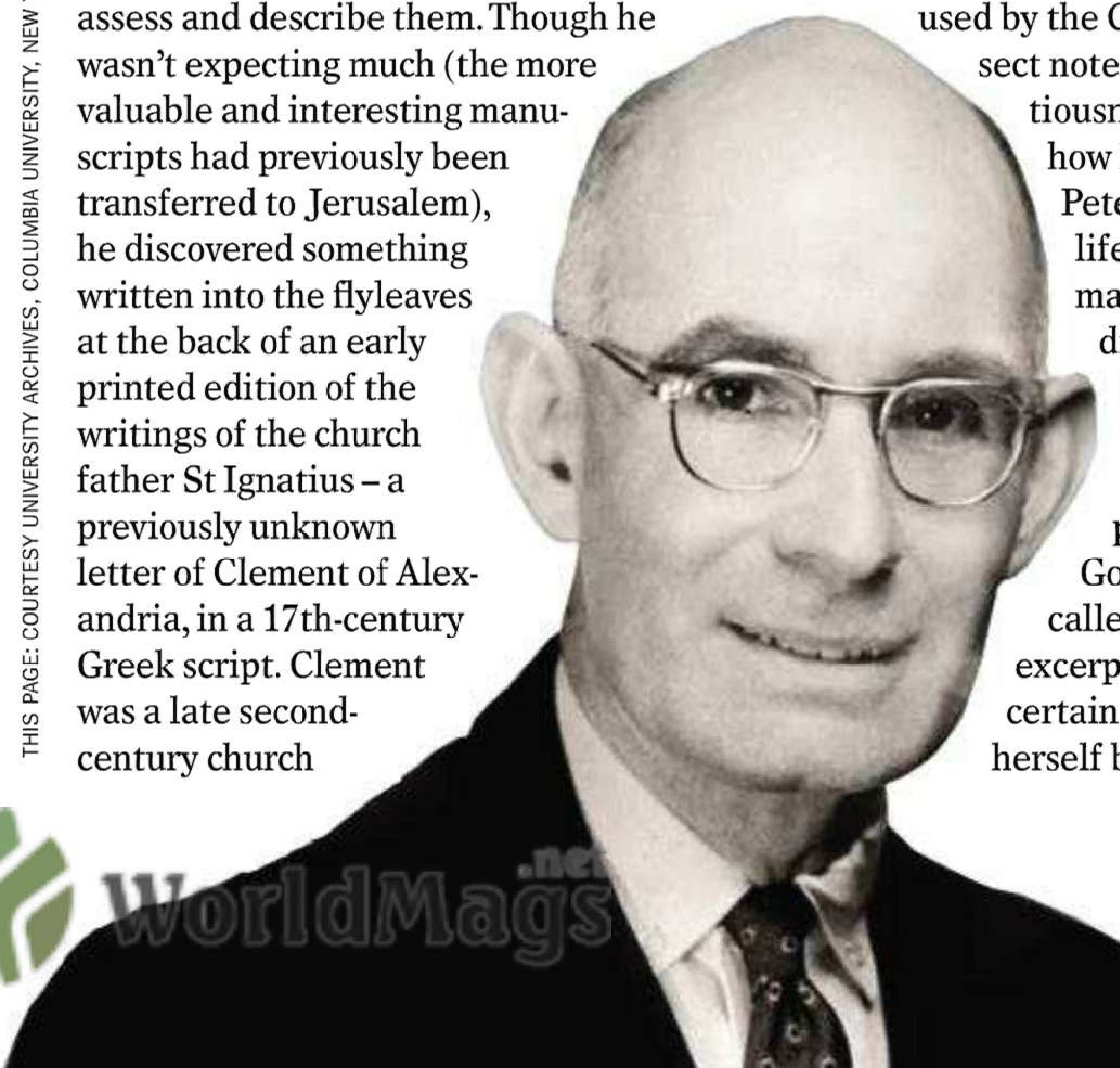
He claimed he found a letter from an early church father

The letter found by Smith begins with a greeting to 'Theodore', a popular Greek name among early Christians meaning "God's gift". It then launches into a discussion of a longer version of the Gospel of Mark, held in secret in Alexandria and used by the Carpocratians, a Gnostic sect noted for their sexual licentiousness. Clement describes how Mark, when in Rome with Peter, wrote an account of the life of Jesus, but after Peter's martyrdom went to Alexandria, where he expanded his account but omitted the secret teachings of Jesus. Clement quotes two passages from this 'Secret Gospel of Mark' (as Smith called it). The first, and crucial, excerpt contains the tale of a certain woman who prostrates herself before Jesus and asks for his mercy as her brother has died. The disciples rebuke her, but Jesus becomes angry and goes to the garden where the tomb is. A cry is heard from the tomb; Jesus rolls away the stone and raises the young man by the hand. The youth takes him back to his house, where they remain for six days. On the evening of the seventh day, the youth comes to him, naked under a linen cloth, and stays the night with Jesus while he is taught the mysteries of the kingdom. The story bears some resemblance to the raising of Lazarus, found only in the Gospel of John. The youth also recalls a similar young man in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14 ("And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.")

The second brief excerpt continues: "And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them." Clement goes on to explain that some scurrilous material including the phrase "naked man with naked man" is not to be found in the secret gospel. The letter breaks off mid-sentence, just as Clement is about to divulge the "true interpretation" of these mysteries.

GENUINE OR FAKE?

Smith photographed the letter (three times for safety) and continued to catalogue the library. On leaving Mar Saba, he showed



LEFT: Biblical scholar Morton Smith.

FACING PAGE: The Mar Saba monastery in the desert outside Jerusalem.

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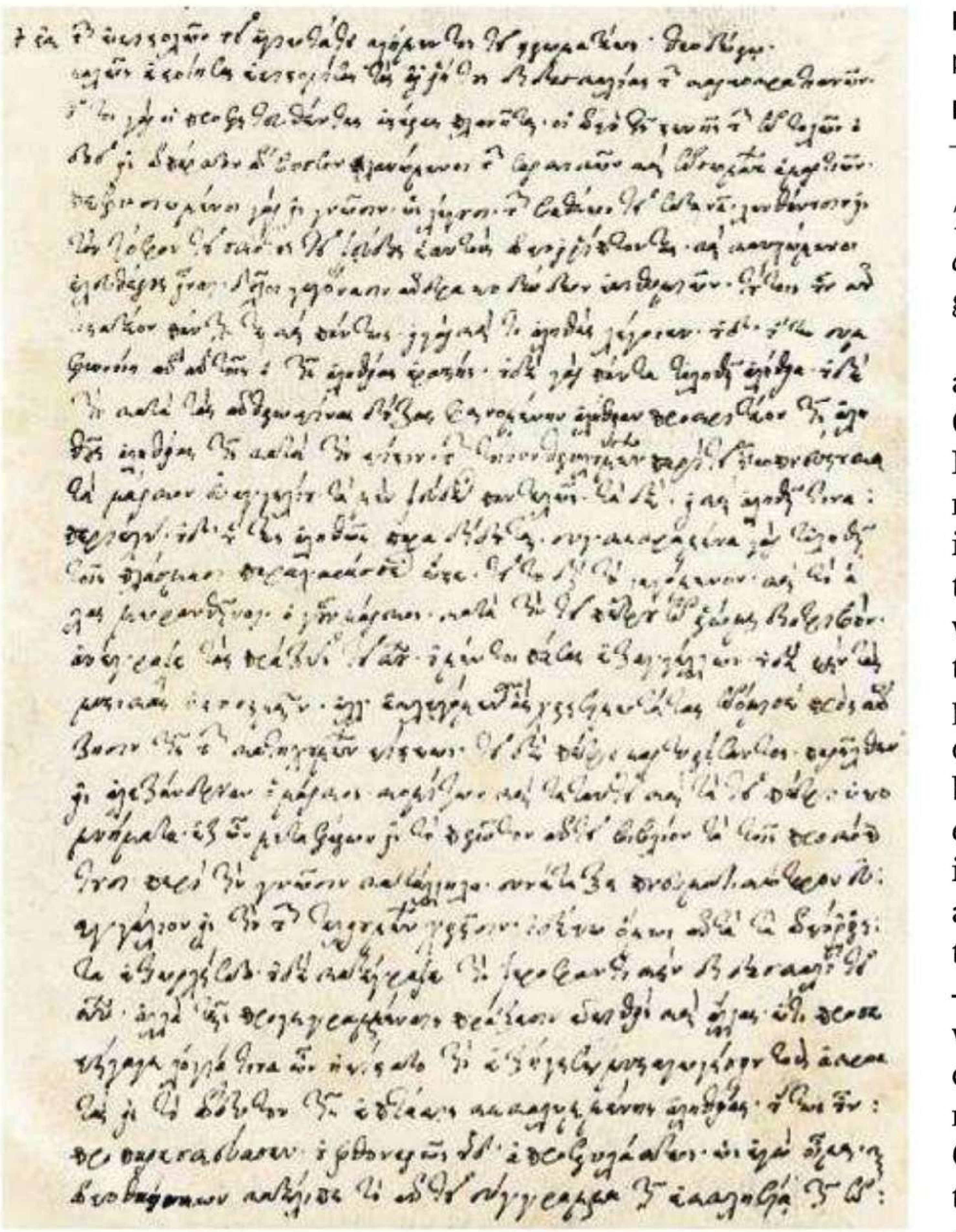
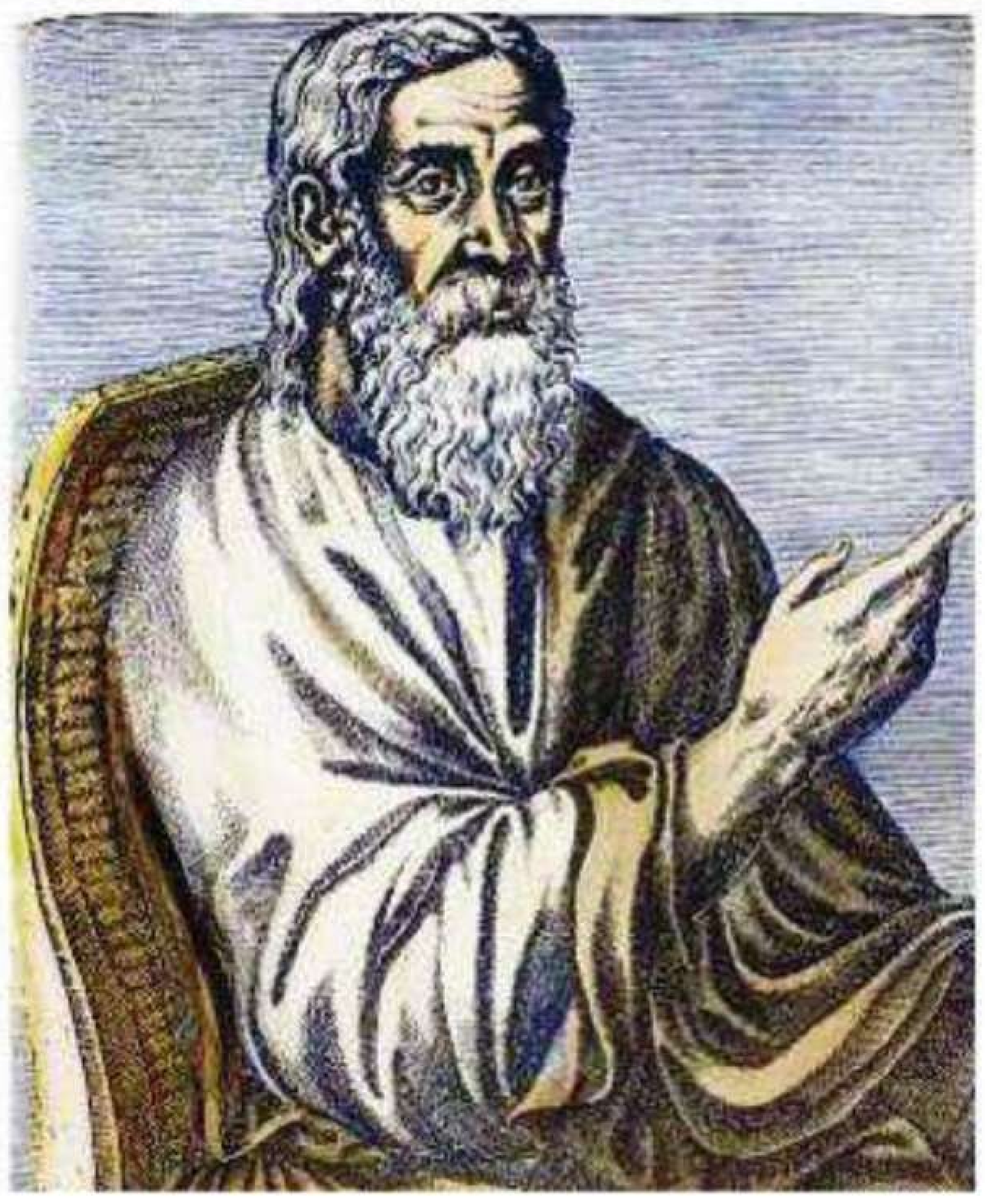
the photographs first to Gerschem Scholem, a leading Jewish scholar with whom Smith had studied, then informally to a range of experts. He was hesitant to publicise the discovery, stating later that he stood the chance of making "an internationally conspicuous fool" of himself if the text turned out to be a forgery, only announcing the find officially in 1960 to the Society of Biblical Literature. Short features were printed in the *New York Times* and *Time* Magazine soon afterwards. Throughout the early 1960s, Smith worked on the text and its implications. By 1966, he had completed an in-depth scholarly work on the letter, and had it accepted by Harvard University Press, but it wasn't until 1972, 14 years after the discovery, that *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* and a much shorter book for a popular audience, *The Secret Gospel*, were finally published.





LEFT: The supposed letter from Clement, photographed by Morton Smith.

BELOW: Clement of Alexandria.

TOPFOTO / THE GRANGER COLLECTION

The academic reception was mixed, but there were a good many hostile reactions to Smith's interpretation of it, and some *ad hominem* attacks – one reviewer even pointing out that Smith was bald (hardly unique!). More than one academic hinted that the letter might be a forgery, but Smith's aggressive responses fought them off. He was keen to anticipate objections, and mentions the possibility of forgery several times.

But Smith's interpretation of the letter went far beyond the evidence: "It was a water baptism administered by Jesus to chosen disciples, singly and by night. The costume, for the disciple, was a linen cloth worn over the naked body… by unknown ceremonies, the disciple was possessed by Jesus's spirit and so united with Jesus. One with him, he participated by hallucination in Jesus's ascent into the heavens, he entered the kingdom of God, and was thereby set free from the laws ordained for and in the lower world. Freedom from the law may have resulted in completion of the spiritual union by physical union." [1]

It was this intimation of a homosexual Jesus that caused particular controversy. *The Secret Gospel* is a peculiar book, full of strangely guarded and careful language and has some odd comments on the fallibility of memory and history. In the preface, Smith writes: "The whole story spans more than 30 years, from 1941 to the present. I am shocked to find how much of it I have already forgotten. No doubt if the past, like a motion picture, could be replayed, I should also be shocked to find how much of the story I have already invented."

Clement said the scurrilous material was not in the secret Gospel

Smith was a good writer – a rarity among academics – and the book had an obvious appeal to those interested in alternative forms of Christianity. It was eventually republished by Dawn Horse, the publishing arm of Adidam, the new religious movement founded by Franklin Jones, known variously as Adi Da, Bubba Free John, Da Free John and others. The Secret Gospel of Mark was referred to in several books by Mark and Elizabeth Clare Prophet, who founded the New Age Church Universal and Triumphant. Eric van Lustbader, who has written dozens of novels, included the Secret Gospel of Mark in his conspiracy-theory thriller *The Testament*. Even *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* summarises the gospel and its discovery.

Probably the most enthusiastic academic adopter of the Secret Gospel of Mark passage was Helmut Koester. Koester is a well-respected source critic, expert in determining where ancient texts have incorporated earlier works into the texts as we have them today. The nature of ancient publishing, which relied entirely on trained scribes copying works by hand, either to scrolls or the emerging codex book format, made it natural for writers to incorporate edited versions of existing texts into their new productions – a laborious analogue of modern word processing in which sources can be copied and pasted and then revised. The best-known product of Old Testament source criticism is the documentary hypothesis, which shows that the Book of Genesis and the rest of the Torah or Pentateuch have been compiled from earlier sources known to scholars as J, E, D and P. The most famous product of New Testament source criticism is the two-source hypothesis, whereby the authors of the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke independently used the Gospel of Mark and a lost 'Q' document to produce their new gospels. Koester analysed the text of Secret Mark and concluded that the version of Mark used by Matthew and Luke had later been redacted or edited to include the Secret Mark material. In other words, The Gospel of Mark that has come down to us *originally* contained the Secret Mark sections, but these were at some point edited out (which gives us at least three versions: original Mark, Secret Mark and canonical Mark).

Other writers have found less orthodox reasons to consider the Mark sections genuine. Journalist John Dart argues that the entire Gospel of Mark features chiasma – parallel verbal devices – in its structure, and that the insertion of the Secret Mark passages revealed new chiasma within the Gospel, showing that those passages were original to Mark. Author, astrologer and Unitarian minister Bill Darlison sees the Gospel of Mark as containing extensive zodiacal characteristics. According to his theory, the Secret Mark section, with its theme of initiation, fits perfectly into the Scorpio section, which would otherwise be very short.

Ten years after the initial publication, Smith wrote an article for the *Harvard Theological Review*, "The Score at the End of the First Decade", which summarised the reception of the Clement letter and Secret Mark, noting which scholars believed it genuine and which fake. If Smith had forged the letter, this was an audacious move. If not, the totting up of a score was still a poke at the inability of scholars to come to a consensus.

ABOVE: Morton Smith at the Mar Saba monastery.

COURTESY THE LIBRARY OF THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SMITH THE HOAXER?

Gaunt, bald and with large ears, Morton Smith lived the bachelor life, eating out and using the oven in his apartment to store books. When at a dinner party he asked the hostess to write out the recipe of a chicken dish for him, she began: “First, take the books out of your oven.”[2] He made many enemies and had a virulent dislike of Christianity and conventional religion. Yet many academics are shocked and upset by the idea that this brilliant man should have poured so much time and energy into a pointless forgery. Bright young scholars who shared Smith’s interests remember him as generous with his time and willing to share constructive criticism and praise with them.

Smith died in 1991, and his personal papers were destroyed at his request. Once he was no longer around to terrorise critics, more questioning voices were raised. In 1992 Andrew Criddle published an article that argued that the vocabulary of the Clement letter was so typically clementine that it was too good to be true.[3] A sample of any author’s work will contain a mixture of the author’s typical vocabulary along with words that are testified only once in that author’s works, known as hapax legomena. Criddle counted the number of hapax legomena and found them to be significantly lower than would be expected. A concordance of Clement’s vocabulary had been available since 1936 and Smith owned a copy in his personal library. This could have enabled him to make a convincing pastiche of Clement..

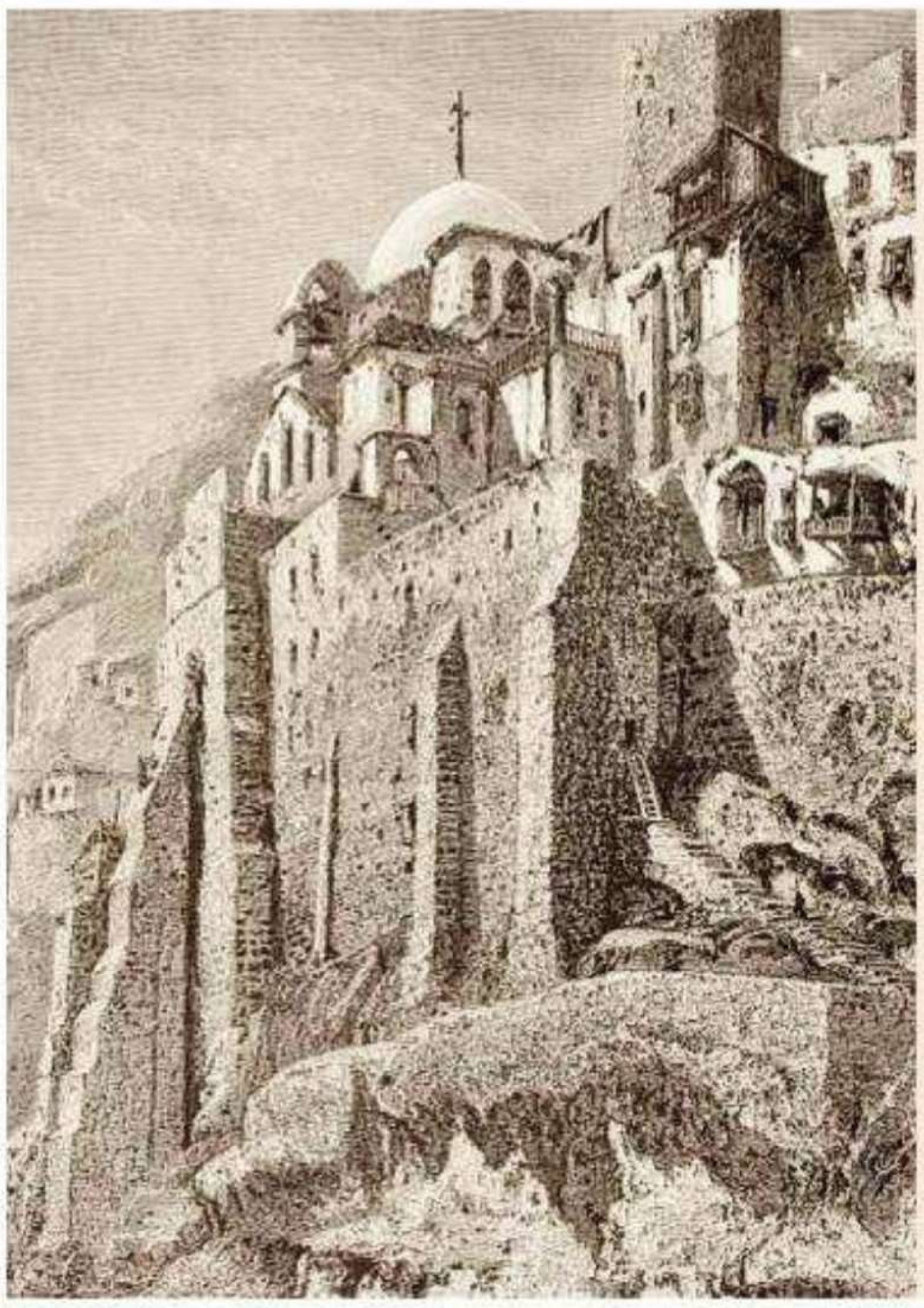
It wasn’t until 2005 that a full-length book, *The Gospel Hoax*, was published which attempted to show that the Saba letter was a forgery – or a hoax, as the author Stephen Carlson preferred to call it.

Carlson was at that time a lawyer with an excellent knowledge of academic scholarship, but has since become an academic himself. He found signs of “forger’s tremor”, a characteristic wobble that occurs when someone is imitating another hand and essentially drawing rather writing. He also believed that Smith had embedded a cryptic signature in the text. A metaphorical reference to salt being mixed, and hence losing its savour, Carlson argued, was anachronistic: salt wasn’t adulterated in ancient times. In the USA, a particular salt company was famous for its free-flowing salt: Morton Salt. Thus, the forger revealed his name in this anachronism. Smith had also identified some writing on a manuscript as a 20th-century hand belonging to one M Madiotes. Carlson thought Madiotes’s handwriting resembled that of the Clement letter, and couldn’t find this surname in Greek telephone directories but discovered that Madiotes could mean both “bald” and “swindler” in modern Greek. Therefore, Madiotes *was* Morton Smith.

Carlson felt that the intimation of homoeroticism between Jesus (in his early thirties) and a young man had to rely on a 20th-century understanding of homosexuality. In the ancient world, homosexual relations were between people of unequal age and social class, and were initiated by the senior partner. Carlson also felt that the homosexual undertones of Jesus meeting a naked man in a public garden at night were a reference to the practice of spontaneous gay sex in public places: Jesus the cruiser!

Many of Carlson’s arguments have been overturned. Further research has shown that the ancients did adulterate salt in various ways, and that there was indeed an M Madiotes who visited the monastery.

Smith himself was gay, and therefore had a motive for needling the homophobic



ALAMY / CLASSIC IMAGE

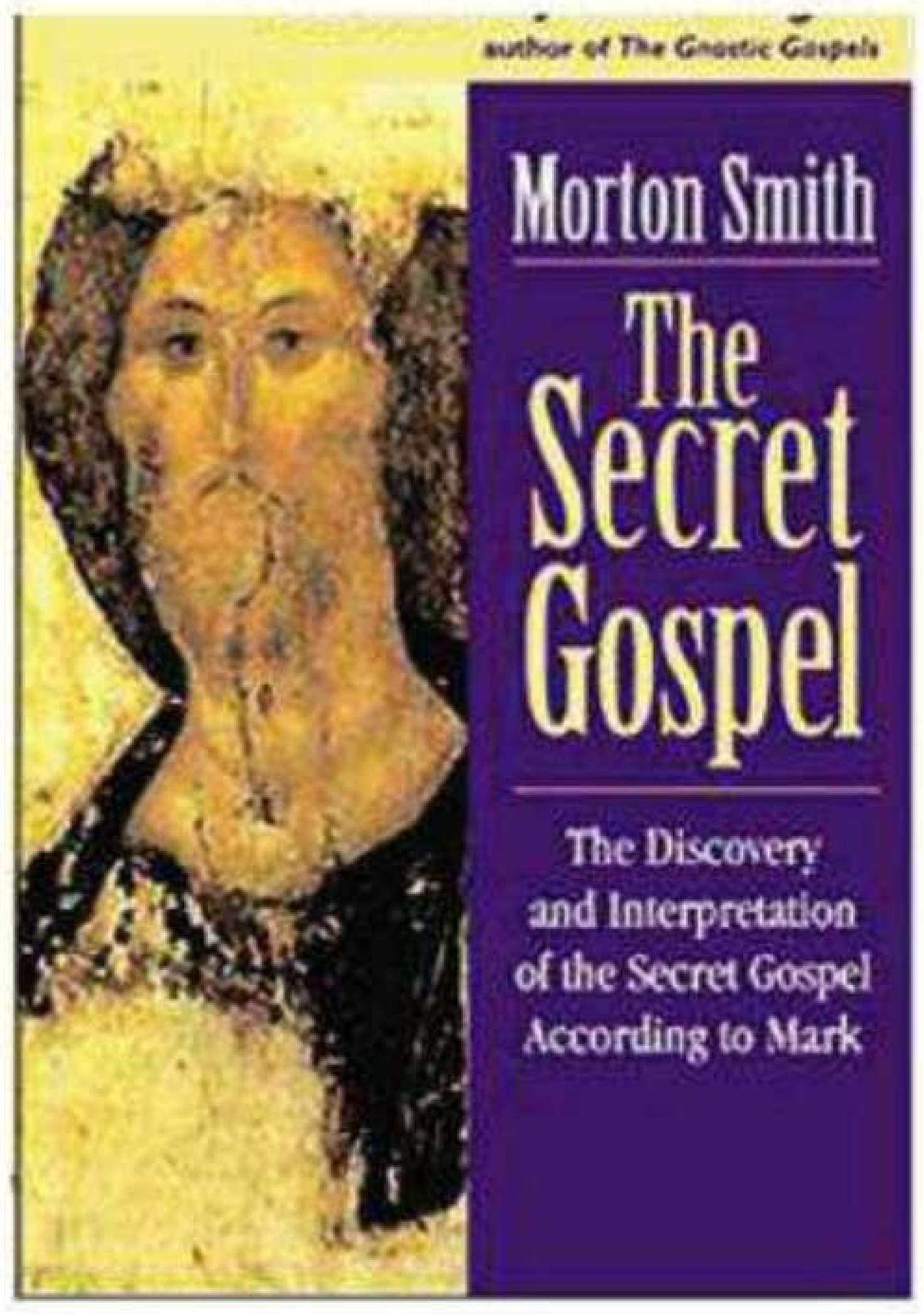
THE MYSTERY OF MAR SABA

Founded in the fifth century, Mar Saba is the world’s longest-running Orthodox monastery. Quotations from three letters of Clement of Alexandria survive in the *Sacra Parallela* traditionally compiled by John of Damascus, who in the eighth century lived and died at Mar Saba, therefore it might seem reasonable for a letter of Clement to be preserved there. But if the letter isn’t genuine, then this would suggest a deliberate modern forgery on the assumption that scholars would make the connection.

The Mystery of Mar Saba, a novel by James Hogg Hunter, was published in 1940, the year before Smith’s first visit to the monastery. It was the 1940s equivalent of *The Da Vinci Code*, a bestseller that went through 12 editions, though it was didactically Christian in its sympathies. The novel concerns a Nazi plot to blackmail a leading scholar into forging an ancient text, named the Shred of Nicodemus, which describes how Nicodemus and Josephus of Arimathea transferred the body of Christ to another location after his death, thus discrediting the Resurrection and the entire basis of Christianity in the cause of propaganda against the British war effort. The forgery is placed at Mar Saba and discovered by Sir William Bracebridge as he is in the process of cataloguing the library – exactly what Morton Smith was doing in 1958. The publicity surrounding the Shred of Nicodemus causes riots, a stock market crash, and anti-Christian riots. Oddly, a minor character in the book is a chief of the London police who helps to discover the Nazi plot, named Lord Moreton – a homonym of Morton. The fragment in the novel refers to the removal of Jesus’s body, and thus shares the subjects of an open tomb and linen cloth with the Secret Gospel of Mark.

church of his time. Or so the academic gossip grapevine reckoned. When Smith's homosexuality was mentioned in a series of articles on Secret Mark in *Biblical Archæology Review*, two readers wrote in to say that their mothers had dated Smith in the 1940s and 50s.

But there were other hints of forgery. Peter Jeffrey found an alleged reference to Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* in the text, in which Salomé (mentioned in the second Secret Mark extract) famously performs the dance of the seven veils. Clement wrote in the letter that Mark wrote his Gospel to invite the reader into "the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven veils".[4]



Several commentators have felt that Smith's longer scholarly book on the letter is unnecessarily complicated, and its footnotes have been found to be inaccurate once the references are followed up. Are these, and Smith's somewhat ungrounded insistence on the presence of homoerotic initiation and ascent mysticism in the text, a further smokescreen to attract criticism to Smith's own contribution and draw attention away from the dubious origins of the text itself?

A number of critics have noted that Clement is overly explicit in his reply to Theodore, giving information that Theodore must already know. This could be down to Smith's awareness of the necessity of giving the information to the reader. Others have observed that none of the other texts in the library were in Latin, and that the letter doesn't contain any of the typical scribal mistakes that enter when a text is copied.

But why should a brilliant scholar risk his career over a joke? Smith is usually seen as wanting to show that he was cleverer than his colleagues and to malign the origins of Christianity. It might not have made any difference to Smith whether the subject of his critical scholarship was an ancient letter or a self-penned forgery – the techniques and the processes would be the same, regardless of the authenticity of the document.

Peter Jeffrey, who wrote a long book called *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, summed it up as "arguably the most grandiose and reticulated 'Fuck You' ever perpetrated in the long and vituperative history of scholarship."[5] Donald Akenson, in *Saint Saul*, dismissed it as "a nice ironic gay joke at the expense of all of the self-important scholars… Anyone who could not spot it as a forgery from a height of 3,000 feet [915m] should not be allowed to make authoritative pronouncements on the authenticity of [ancient] texts."[6]

The magazine *Biblical Archæology Review* devoted a special issue to Secret Mark,[7] heavily biased towards its authenticity. They followed it up by inviting two experts in Greek handwriting to assess the likelihood of forgery. One was Venetia Anastasopoulou, a court expert in modern handwriting forgery, the other a leading academic expert on mediæval Greek manuscripts, Agamemnon Tselikas, who played a major part in deciphering the Greek on the Antikythera Mechanism, the famous ancient astronomical computing device (see **FT250:51–53**). Anastasopoulou responded that, based on the samples of Morton Smith's own Greek handwriting given to her, Smith would have been unable to forge the Clement letter. Smith's writing, she wrote, was blocky and at a grade-school level, whereas the Greek of the Clement letter was "written spontaneously with an excellent rhythm". *BAR* later had Anastasopoulou assess whether the handwriting showed signs of forgery in general, rather than specifically by Smith. Again, she replied that the letter showed no signs of forgery.

Tselikas missed his deadlines, but turned out to have been very busy nonetheless.[8] In an informal interview with American academic Charles Hedrick, he laid out his observations and reasoning surrounding the letter as follows.[9]

When the Mar Saba library was catalogued in 1925, the Ignatius volume in which Smith claimed to have found the Clement letter was not present, or at least was not catalogued. The handwriting of the Clement letter is very similar to that found in those from the Kefalonia monastery in Greece, but the letters were not formed in the direction usual for the copyists of that time and the letter *tau* was written atypically, without ligatures. Tselikas considered it impossible that a 17th- or 18th-century monk would have written in that style.

One of the Kefalonia manuscripts that resemble the Clement letter contains a note about making the ink of the period. Smith listed this manuscript when he catalogued the library of Kefalonia. So it is certain that Smith had viewed handwriting that resembles that used in the Clement letter, yet he didn't comment on this similarity in any of his publications. One of the principal ways of testing the authenticity of the original document would be to analyse the ink. But Smith knew how to mix that particular ink, so even such a test might prove to be inconclusive.

It may have been impossible for Smith to have written the letter during his stay at Mar Saba – the cramped cell would have been a difficult place to produce a good forgery. In which case, the Ignatius book, in which Smith claimed to have found the letter, may have already been in Smith's possession, and he (or an accomplice) copied the letter before his 1958 visit to Mar Saba.

Tselikas also infers that Morton Smith was likely to have had some connection to

MODERN GOSPELS

If the Secret Gospel of Mark turns out to be a forgery, it will join a small but significant canon of forged Gospels or modern apocrypha. Most of these are pious forgeries, with either their creators or their popularisers sincerely believing in the significance of the writings. The supposed original language manuscripts for each of these works is missing, an important point of comparison and contrast with the Clement letter, for which Smith presented photographs but made no attempt to secure the original. A few of these "strange new gospels" – as biblical scholar Edgar Goodspeed described them – are listed below.

THE LIFE OF ST ISSA

The granddaddy of all of the speculation about Jesus in India (**FT183:28–32**). Supposedly discovered in 1887 by Russian journalist Nicolas Notavitch in a Tibetan Monastery.

THE SONNINI MANUSCRIPT

Contained the lost final chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Chapter 29 describes how Paul made his way to Britain, meeting the British Israelite tribes. The original manuscript came from Constantinople but was, sadly, lost.

THE AQUARIAN GOSPEL OF JESUS THE CHRIST

An extraordinarily popular gospel, having gone through dozens of printings. First published in 1907, dictated from the Akashic records by Levi H Dowling, this lengthy work draws heavily on the canonical Gospels but also depicts Jesus as travelling widely – not just in India, but in Tibet, Persia, Egypt, Greece and other countries in the Near-East and Mediterranean.

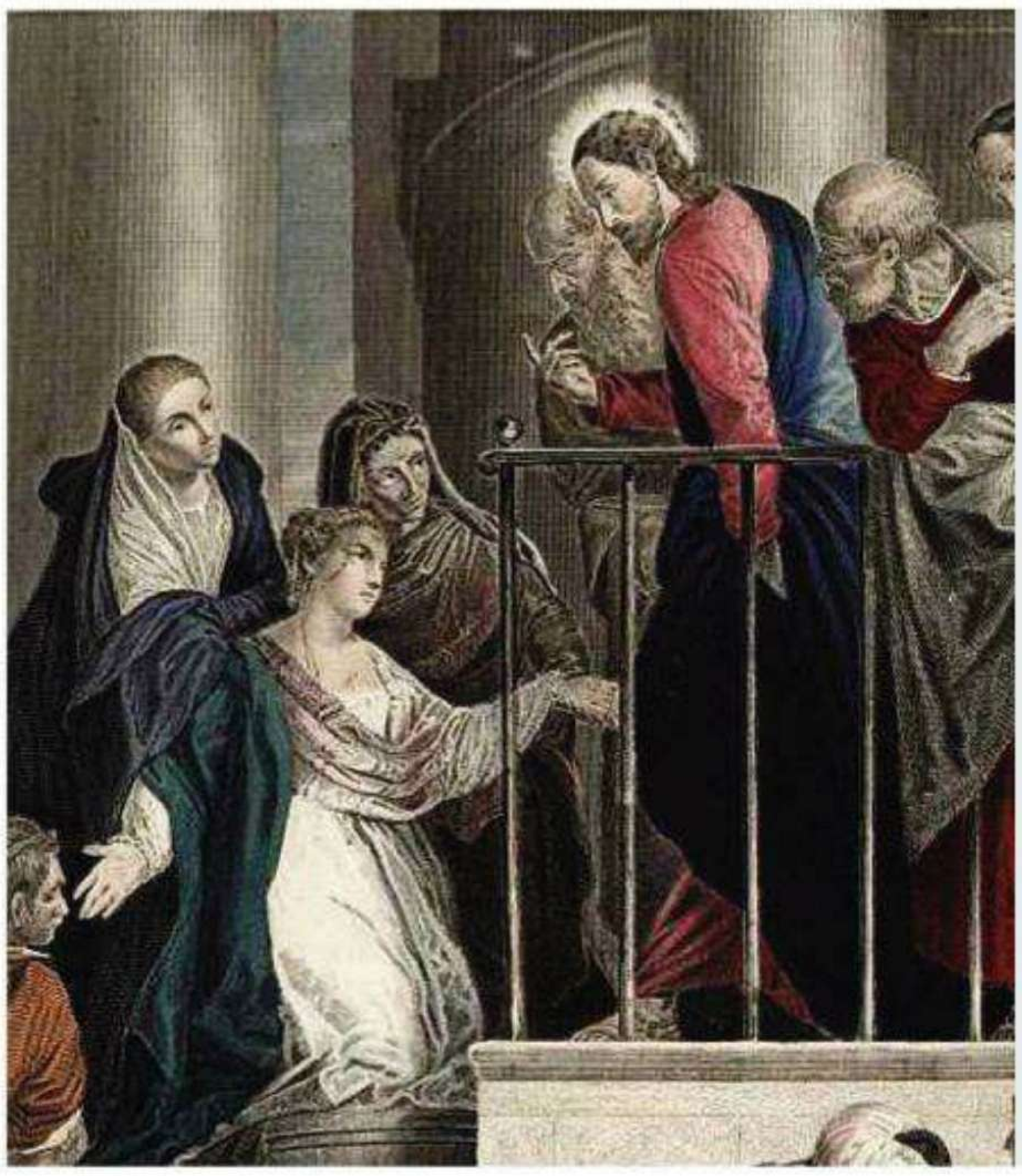
THE ESSENE GOSPEL OF PEACE

Published before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Depicts a nudist, vegetarian Jesus who was particularly appealing to the health movement of late 1920s–early 1930s Germany, in which its "translator", Edmond Bordeaux Szekely, flourished. This Gospel is translated from original Aramaic and Hebrew texts from the Vatican secret library. Szekely was unable to produce the originals, alas.

THE TALMUD OF JMANNUEL [*SIC*]

Bizarrely invents a new character, Juda Ithariot, Jesus's betrayer who was in league with Saul/Paul. The similarly named Judas Iscariot was innocent of the deed and was the best friend of Jesus. The original Aramaic scroll was discovered in a cave in 1963 but unfortunately was lost once it had been translated into German and English. UFOs are somehow involved.

Scholar PR Coleman-Norton published an otherwise unknown dialogue with Jesus, supposedly discovered in the library of a mosque in Morocco during World War II, in which he explains, after the saying that "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth", that teeth will be provided for those who lack them. A pupil of his later pointed out that Coleman-Norton had previously made the same joke repeatedly in classes.



GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

JESUS THE MAGICIAN

Morton Smith's other book for a popular audience was *Jesus the Magician*. One of the main problems in historical Jesus research, which tries to apply the same historical-critical standards to the Gospels as one would to other ancient texts, is determining a context in which the character of Jesus fits. Is he a rabbi, a prophet, a Jewish equivalent of the Greek travelling cynic philosophers, a charismatic healer, a claimant to the throne of Israel? Smith's answer was that Jesus fitted into the ancient category of magician. The earliest versions of Jesus's miracles in the Gospel of Mark often contain the step-by-step processes characteristic of magic. Common also to the Gospels and ancient magic are aspects of the symbolism of the New Testament – light, the son of God, "I am" statements – and practices such as fasting, healing, the binding and loosing of demons and spirits and exorcism. Jesus was accused of being a magician by some of the second-century enemies of Christianity such as Celsus. Smith shows strong similarities between the miracle stories and healings attributed to ancient magic. Christian scholars have been obviously reluctant to see magical elements in the New Testament and *Jesus the Magician* was generally greeted with scorn. In recent years, Robert Conner has continued Smith's work in two books, *Jesus the Sorcerer* and *Magic in the New Testament*.

contemporary espionage in the area. Greece had been involved in a civil war between the British-backed government and the communist Democratic Army of Greece. Smith would have needed permission from the British and Greek governments to travel at that time to the monasteries that he visited in Greece, and he visited a remote monastery run by an exiled bishop who had backed the communist forces. This suggests a possible secondary motive of espionage. When Tselikas's findings were published online by *BAR* (in imperfect English) many of his conclusions were presented without making explicit the reasoning behind them. Other academic pundits remain unconvinced by his verdict.

In 1976, the Ignatius volume was removed to the small Patriarchate Library in Jerusalem, and a set of photographs was taken of the Clement letter. However, the library went on to separate the manuscript pages from the rest of the printed book. Tselikas searched the Greek Orthodox Patricarchate Library in Jerusalem thoroughly, but couldn't find either: both the book and the Clement letter now appear to be lost. But even if Smith *had* forged the letter, it appears certain that he had nothing to do with its eventual disappearance. It is another of the strange mystifications surrounding Secret Mark.

STRANGER THAN HISTORY

To summarise, the arguments most suggestive of forgery are the following:

The Ignatius volume was not catalogued along with the rest of the library in 1925. No other Latin volume was found there. Smith made no attempt to revisit the monastery or to secure the volume for conservation or analysis. The vocabulary of the clementine sections is so typical of Clement that it may be statistically unlikely to be by Clement himself. Smith owned a volume containing a concordance of Clement's vocabulary. The Secret Mark sections resemble a pastiche of Markian phrases. The handwriting resembles that of a copyist from the Kefalonia monastery, but there are anomalies that are untypical of the period. Smith read a manuscript at that same monastery describing how to make the ink of the period.

As further factors, we can consider the following: the liturgical/baptismal elements may be anachronistic. It is peculiar, to say the least, to find a reference both to Salomé and the seven veils in this short letter. The homosexual relations, if present, are anachronistic. The last page of the printed volume of Ignatius, opposite the handwritten Clement letter, contained a discussion of forgery. Morton Smith had the right range of talents and interests to make the forgery, excepting perhaps the handwriting. He had published, if briefly, on most of the important areas of study connected with Clement and Secret Mark.

The arguments for authenticity are less positive, and rely on the lack of any direct evidence for forgery (especially given the unavailability of the manuscript). Many of the arguments for a hoax are reversible and depend on judgement calls. Smith's correspondence shows him debating the significance of the letter and developing his ideas on it over a long period of time. Some scholars who worked with Smith on the letter find it unbelievable that he could have been faking sincerity all that time. Another possibility is that the manuscript *was* genuinely found by Morton Smith, and yet many elements of it are not authentic. The letter might not be by Clement but by an early follower or imitator. The Secret Mark passages could be later imitations and extensions of the Gospel. Smith's own interpretation of the letter and Gospel could be completely erroneous without casting any aspersions on the basic authenticity of the letter.

Could Smith's brilliance and intimate knowledge of academic thinking have enabled him to pass off a forged text for the duration of his own lifetime? I veer towards it being a forgery, but the entire question is still very much up in the air. If it is indeed a fake, what does this say about the nature of academic scholarship? Perhaps there is no better summary of the problem of Secret Mark than Smith's own duplicitous ending to his popular book: "History, however, is by definition the search for the *most probable* explanations of preserved phenomena. When several explanations are possible, the historian must always choose the most probable one. But the truth is that improbable things sometimes happen. Therefore truth is necessarily stranger than history."

Author Biography

ANDREW PHILLIP SMITH is editor of *The Gnostic: A Journal of Gnosticism, Western Esotericism and Spirituality* and author of *A Dictionary of Gnosticism*; *The Gnostics: History, Tradition, Scriptures, Influence*; *The Lost Sayings of Jesus: Annotated & Explained* and other books.

NOTES

1 Morton Smith: *The Secret Gospel*, pp113–114.

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3 "On the Mar Saba Letter Attributed to Clement of Alexandria", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3.2, 1995, 215–220.

4 Smith does in fact refer to Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* in *The Secret Gospel*, p70, writing that the Salome in Secret Mark should not be confused with the daughter of Herodias as celebrated by Oscar Wilde.

5 Peter Jeffrey: *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, Yale University Press, 2007, p242.

6 Donald Akenson: *Saint Saul: A Skeleton Key to the Historical Jesus*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p88.

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9 See http://bit.ly/om8GOp (stephanhuller.blogspot.com).

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The Navy Lark

Many folk songs describe women joining the Army disguised as men. But, as **PAUL CHAMBERS** discovered, cross-dressing females more often looked to the Senior Service for a home.

PAUL CHAMBERS is a freelance writer and TV producer. Among his books are *Bedlam*, *Murder Most Foul*, *Jumbo*, and *The Cock Lane Ghost*.

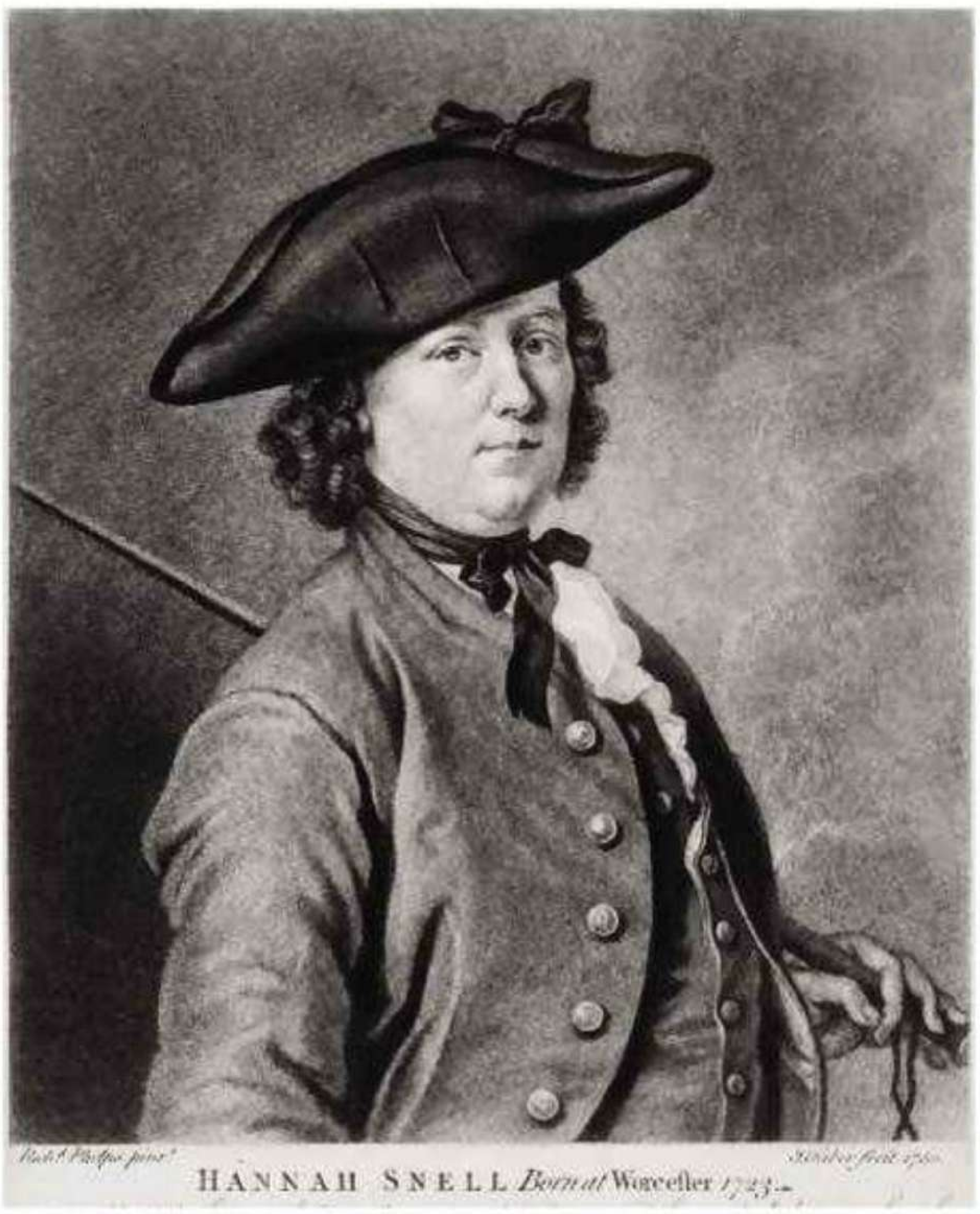
History has given us many famous cross-dressers, including such notables as J Edgar Hoover and the legendary Pope Joan, but during the 18th and early 19th century there developed an English tradition for "female sailors" some of whom became legends in their own lifetime.

The most famous was Hannah Snell (1723–1791) who, in 1745, escaped a troubled marriage by dressing in her brother-in-law's suit and running away. A few days later, she was approached on the streets by a recruitment officer who mistook her for a man. In no time, Hannah was serving as "James Gray", a Marine onboard *HMS Swallow*.

Hannah found it easy to pass herself off as a young man, although her ability to cook, clean and stitch led to her being called "the most handy boy". After three years of battles, Hannah was promoted to second lieutenant. Some of her colleagues had grown suspicious at her inability to grow a beard and gave her the nickname of Miss Molly Gray, but her luck held out until August 1749, when a French sniper placed six shot in her right leg, a further five in her left leg and one in her groin.

Hannah lay at death's door for two days but still managed to conceal her groin wound from the surgeon after extracting the embedded musket ball by "probing the wound with my finger till I came where the ball lay, and then… thrust in both my finger and thumb and pulled it out." Hannah survived and in May 1750 was shipped back to London.

Once onshore, she collected her pay and went to the pub with her shipmates. There she announced to her soldier friends that she would shed her skin "like a snake, and become a new creature". Hannah loosened her clothes, revealed her true identity and said, "I am as much a woman as my mother ever was." Her friends were impressed, praising Hannah for her courage and fortitude.


HANNAH SNELL Born at Worcester 1723.

ABOVE: Female Marine Hannah Snell.

The "Female Soldier" became a local celebrity. She published her life story, which made her enough money to buy a pub (The Widow in Masquerade) and retire. She caused a second sensation when, in 1791, she was admitted to London's Bedlam Hospital suffering from what would appear to be dementia. She died soon afterwards and was buried, with ceremony, at the Royal Chelsea Hospital, an institution that cared for old and injured soldiers. She was only the second woman to be laid to rest among male Army colleagues.

Hannah Snell was the first and most famous of the female sailors (although still part of the Army in the 1740s, the Marines were based on naval boats) but in the decades to come there were to be two other similar cross-dressing celebrities. The first of these was Mary Anne Talbot (1778–1808) who joined the Navy in 1792 as "John Taylor" to be near to her lover, Captain Essex Bowen. Following his death at sea, Mary remained part of the crew and had many remarkable adventures before being wounded and captured by the French. She only revealed her female identity when, on her release from French captivity, the Navy tried to force her back into service. Mary Lacy (1740-?) had a similar career after joining the Navy in 1759 as William Cavendish, a carpenter. She served as a shipwright for 12 years before being invalided out with arthritis. Both she and Talbot were awarded full pensions.

These were not isolated cases, as searches of *The Times* index produced five other examples between 1807 and 1840 (intriguingly, similar searches for female soldiers drew a blank), including four anonymous female sailors, plus Marianne (alias William) Johnson, who served for four years in the Merchant Navy and was discovered in 1807 after she fainted, causing a colleague to loosen her uniform. All these women were summarily dismissed from service, but most received either recognition for their service and/or a pension.

Why the Navy should have been so attractive to women is a mystery, but it might be linked to an indiscriminate recruitment policy and a lack of formal medical assessment, making it easier for a woman to hide her sex than in the Army, where fitness for duty was of more concern. As regards motivation – there have been hints that Snell and others cross-dressed out of sexual gratification, but there is no evidence of this. They seem to have joined the Navy to escape a troubled domestic life. Like many others, they may simply have joined up in search of pay and adventure.

A final word should perhaps go to the myth of William Brown, a grog-swilling African woman who was said to have served for 12 years as "captain of the fore-top" aboard *HMS Queen Charlotte*. This story first appeared in the 1815 *Annual Register* and has been repeated many times. However, a recent investigation of the *Queen Charlotte*'s muster rolls found that a sailor named William Brown had joined the ship in May 1815, but a month later was discharged for "being a female". In that time she did not leave dry land. FT

SOURCES

R Kirby (1809): *The Intrepid Female* (Mary Ann Talbot).

M Lacy (1773): *The History of the Female Shipwright* (Mary Lacy).

R Walker (1750): *The Female Solider* (Hannah Snell).

Times, 10 Jun 1840; 29 Jul 1835; 12 Nov 1807; 3 Sep 1813.

History Today, Oct 2002 (William Brown).

Antiquarian's menagerie

The megalopedus, the sukotyro, and a very cryptic cabinet of curiosities by Dr KARL SHUKER

Dr KARL SHUKER is a long-time regular *FT* contributor and the author of many books on cryptozoology and other fortean topics. *Karl Shuker's Alien Zoo* was published in 2010.

It is always a delight to unearth accounts of hitherto obscure mystery beasts from the archives of antiquity. Lately, two such creatures have occupied my attention simultaneously, though with very different outcomes.

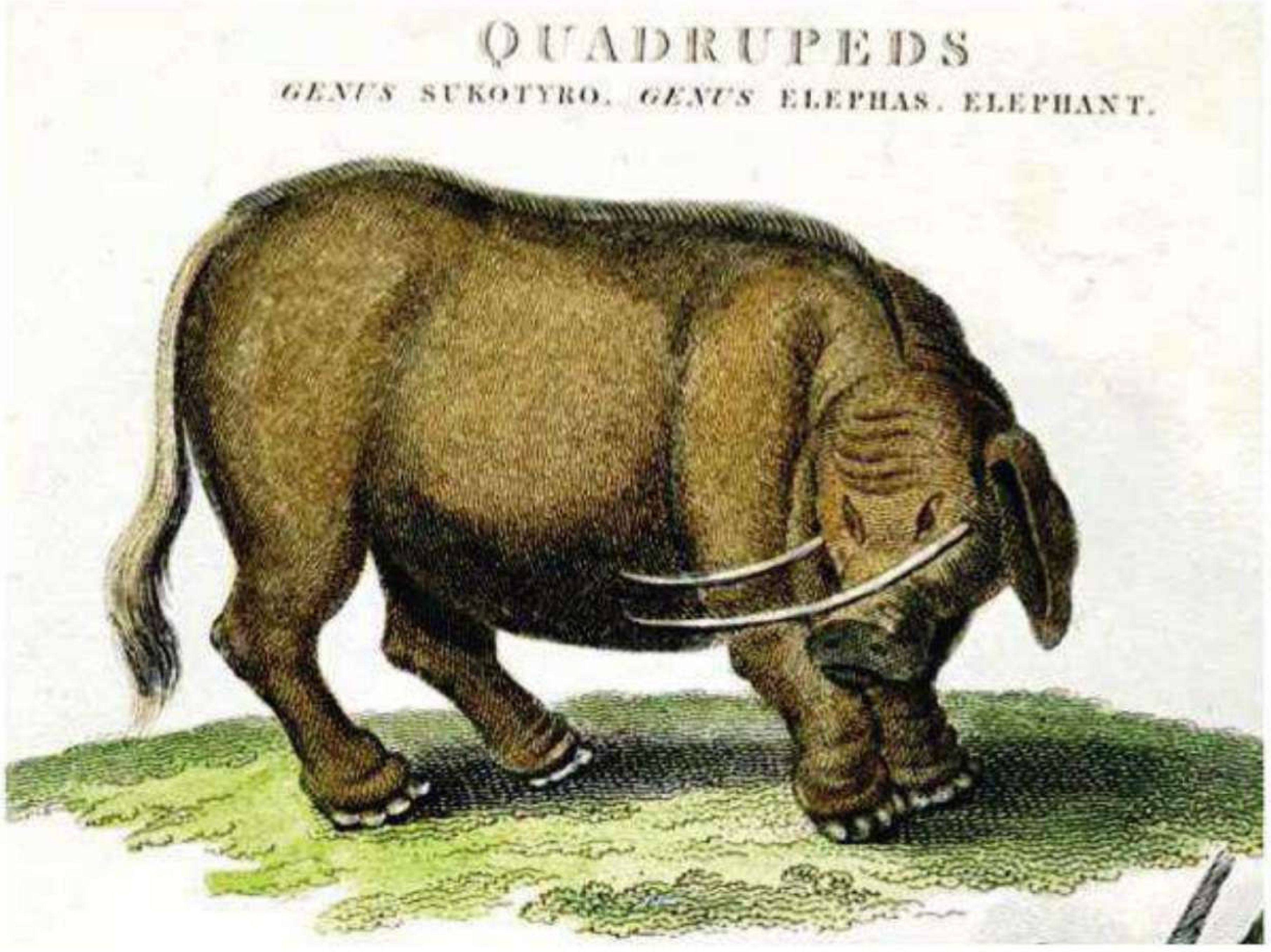
In early 2011, Marc Gaglione asked me: "What are some animals, small or large, that are known only from a single specimen, skin, or skull? Is there something called a Tusked Megalopedus? I read the name somewhere."

Internet searches yielded a single but highly informative source. It stated that this mysterious creature had been described by Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79), author of the encyclopædic work *Naturalis Historia*. It also claimed that the only known specimen of the megalopedus was ensconced in a quite extraordinary cabinet of curiosities, and it included a description of this collection by a visiting journalist that contains a brief account of that unique specimen:

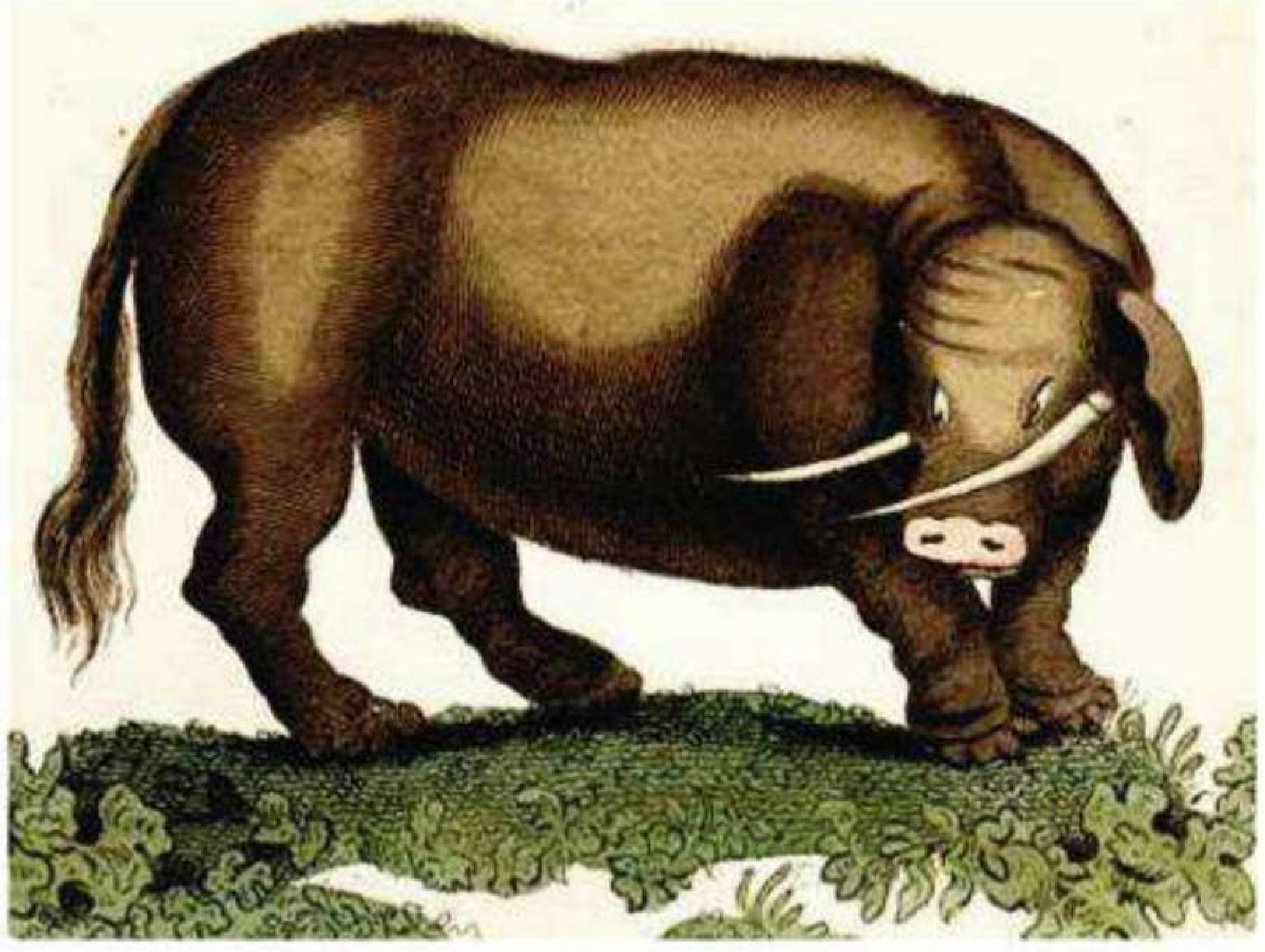
"…a strange stuffed animal greeted his eye: a large, tapirlike mammal with a huge muzzle, powerful forelegs, bulbous head, and curving tusks. It was like nothing he had ever seen before: a freak. He bent down to make out the dim label: *Only known specimen of the Tusked Megalopedus, described by Pliny, thought to be fantastical until this specimen was shot in the Belgian Congo by the English explorer Col. Sir Henry F. Moreton, in 1869…* [But] could it be true? A large mammal, completely unknown to science?"

So where can this peerless repository of the world's only tusked megalopedus, and untold other scientific treasures besides, be found? Yes, you've guessed it – in the pages of a novel: *The Cabinet of Curiosities* by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child, published In 2002.

This is where Marc had read about the megalopedus, but he had wondered whether the animal itself might have been genuine. Certainly, Pliny documented many bizarre creatures in his encyclopædia, but as far as I am aware there is no mention of the tusked megalopedus in any of his works. Another reason for doubting the existence of this ultra-cryptic creature supposedly hailing from the Belgian Congo is that the name of its discoverer, Col. Sir Henry F Moreton, is clearly inspired by that of a real explorer, Sir Henry Morton Stanley, who did indeed contribute to a major zoological discovery in the Belgian Congo – the okapi, in 1901.


QUADRUPEDS
GENUS SUKOTYRO. GENUS ELEPHAS. ELEPHANT.

Dr KARL SHUKER



Dr KARL SHUKER

TOP: The sukotyro of Java – an 1806 illustration.

ABOVE: Another depiction of the sukotyro, this one from 1819.

All presentations of this creature seen by the author seem to have been redrawn from a 1669 original.

Having said that, there is one final, but extremely significant twist in the tale of the tusked megalopedus. Even though this is assuredly a make-believe mammal, its description is strangely reminiscent of a seemingly genuine yet wholly obscure, long-forgotten mystery beast that I serendipitously uncovered during my megalopedus investigations – the sukotyro of Java.

While seeking possible images of the megalopedus, I spotted a very unusual antiquarian print for sale online. It depicted two animals: a duck-billed platypus and an entirely unfamiliar hoofed mammal labelled as the sukotyro. This print was a colour plate taken from Ebenezer Sibly's *A Universal System of Natural History* (1794). Further Internet perusal soon yielded several other plates showing this same creature, all dating from the early 19th century. Intriguingly, these plates' depictions, despite emanating from different sources, were all clearly based upon the same original illustration.

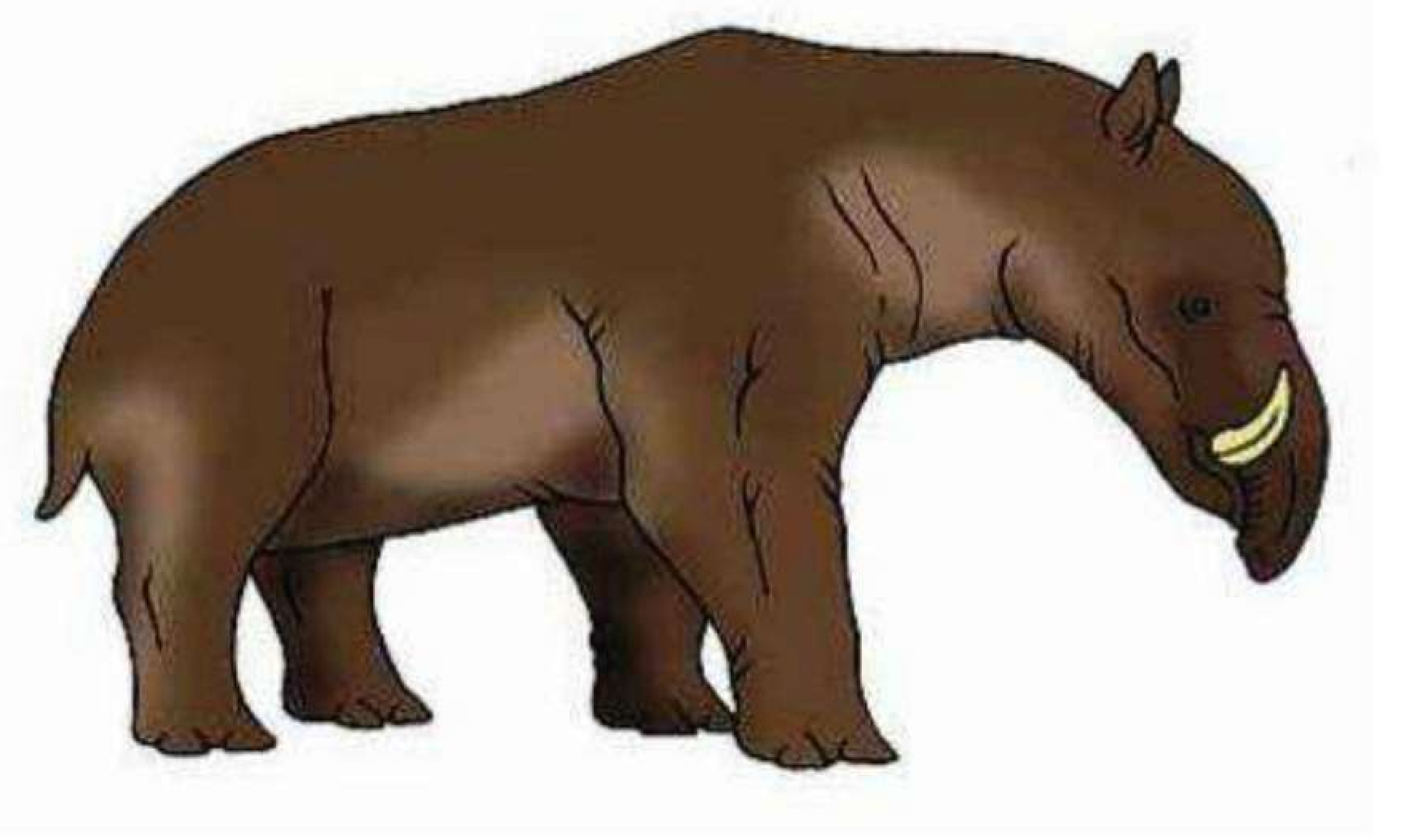
As the images reproduced here reveal, the sukotyro doesn't readily resemble any known mammal. Its large, burly body (variously portrayed as elephantine grey or deep-brown) is somewhat rhinoceros-like in general shape but its smooth skin lacks these creatures' characteristic armour, and its long, bushy-tipped tail differs from their shorter versions. Equally distinct is the short, upright, narrow mane that runs down the entire length of its back. Furthermore, each of its feet appears to possess four hooves (thereby allying it with the pigs, hippos, camels, ruminants, and other even-toed ungulates or artiodactyls, whereas the rhinos are odd-toed ungulates or perissodactyls). Its head is also totally unlike that of any rhinoceros, sporting a sturdy but elongate, hornless muzzle ending in a pair of decidedly porcine nostrils, a pair of long, pendant ears, and, most distinctive of all, a pair of truly extraordinary tusks.

Bizarrely, all of the sukotyro illustrations that I have seen depict these tusks emerging from a point located directly beneath and behind the eyes rather than from any anterior region of the jaws. In addition, they are held above the level of the snout, and (rather like those of elephants) are almost entirely horizontal in orientation with only their tips exhibiting a slight upward curve. I can only assume, therefore, that these depictions are meant to signify that the sukotyro's tusks emerge from some site at the back of the (upper?) jaws.

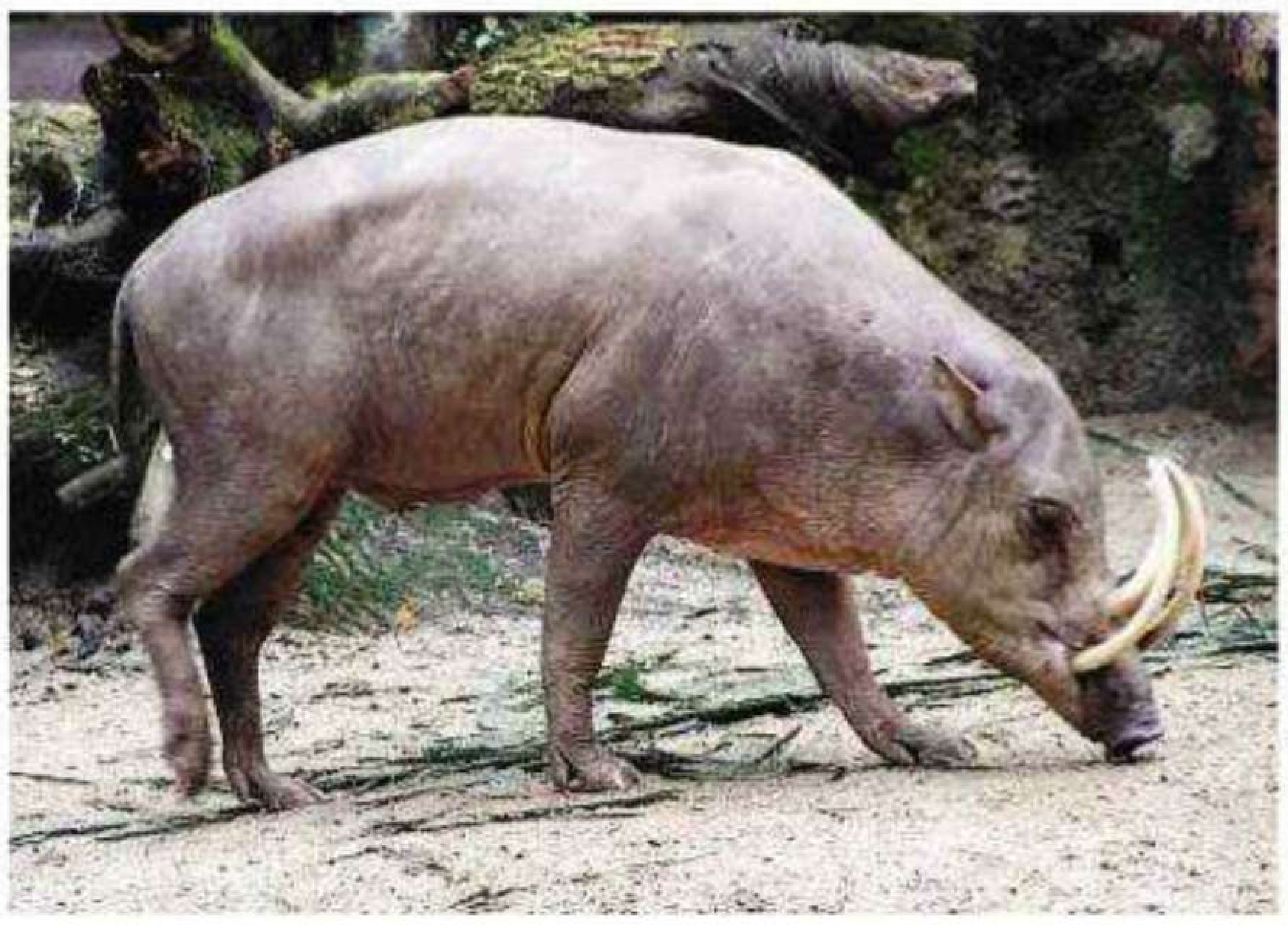
Tusks aside, in overall appearance the sukotyro resembles a big wild pig, but where does (or did) it come from and what is known about this strange creature? My continuing searches revealed that the sukotyro received its most authoritative scientific coverage in 1799 by British Museum zoologist Dr George Shaw in vol. 1 of his exhaustive 16-vol *General Zoology: Or Systematic Natural History*. Inserting it directly but somewhat hesitantly after the elephant in this volume's main text (and neglecting to mention, incidentally, that in 1792 its species had been formally christened *Sukotyro indicus* by fellow zoologist Robert Kerr), Shaw concisely documented the enigmatic Sukotyro as follows:

"This, according to [Johan] Niewhoff [aka Niuhoff and Neuhoff], its only describer, and who has figured it in his travels to the East Indies [*Die Gesantschaft der Ost-Indischen Gesellschaft in den Vereinigten Niederländern*, 1669, containing the original illustration upon which all others seen by me are based], is a quadruped of a very singular shape. Its size is that of a large ox: the snout like that of a hog: the ears long and rough; and the tail thick and bushy. The eyes are placed upright in the head, quite differently from those of other quadrupeds. On each side [of] the head, next to the eyes, stand the horns, or rather teeth, not quite so thick as those of an Elephant. This animal feeds upon herbage, and is but seldom taken. It is a native of Java, and is called by the Chinese *Sukotyro*. This is all the description given by Niewhoff. The figure is repeated in Churchill's Collection of Voyages and Travels, vol. 2. p. 360. Niewhoff was a Dutch traveller, who visited the East Indies about the middle of the last century, viz. about the year 1563 [*sic* – should be 1653], and continued his peregrinations for several years. It must be confessed that some of the figures introduced into his works are not remarkable for their accuracy."

This would presumably explain, therefore, the anatomically aberrant positioning of the sukotyro's tusks, and also, probably, the upright positioning of its eyes. Of course, if the latter are portrayed correctly, it could be suggested that the sukotyro spends time submerged in water, with only its eyes showing above the surface, as with hippopotamuses, whose eyes are also placed high on their skull. However, so too are the hippo's nostrils and ears, whereas those of the sukotyro are not.



TIM MORRIS



HIRSCHEBER-WIKIPEDIA

TOP: Reconstruction of the probable appearance of the tusked megalopedus.

ABOVE: The babirusa of Indonesia.

The sukotyro could be a prehistoric survivor

As for the sukotyro's tusks: ignoring their potentially inaccurate horizontal orientation, they remind me very much both in shape and size of those equally bizarre versions sported by the babirusas of Indonesia. These grotesque-looking wild pigs are famous for the huge vertical tusks sported by the males, in which not only the lower tusks but also the much larger upper ones project vertically upwards, with the upper ones growing directly through the top of the snout.

Babirusas are native to Celebes (Sulawesi) and various much smaller islands close by, but zoologists believe that they may have been deliberately introduced onto at least some of these latter isles by human activity rather than by natural migration. If so, might they also have been transported elsewhere in Indonesia, perhaps as far west as Java, in fact?

Following Shaw's cautious coverage of the sukotyro, other zoologists adopted an even more sceptical view of it. This deepened still further following the revelation that a pair of alleged sukotyro tusks acquired by British Museum founder Sir Hans Sloane during the 1700s were actually the horns of an Indian water buffalo. These had been presented as a gift to Sloane by a Mr Doyle after he had discovered them in a partially wormeaten state inside the cellar of a shop in Wapping, London, and were formally documented in 1727 within the *Memoirs of the Academy of Sciences*. Eventually, with no further specimens or data regarding it coming to light, the scientific world dismissed the sukotyro as a hoax, after which it quietly vanished from the natural history books. But was it really a hoax?

The more I look at the depictions of the sukotyro, the more they seem to resemble a distorted but still-identifiable portrait of a babirusa. There is no indication that any of these porcine species exist on Java today, but perhaps Niewhoff's mystifying sukotyro is evidence that one did exist there long ago. Alternatively, could this cryptid even have been an unknown relative of the babirusas, differing from them via its bulkier form and longer ears, but still recognisably akin?

Finally, an even more controversial possibility is that the sukotyro was a *bona fide* prehistoric survivor. If we assume that its extraordinary tusks really were horizontal, its overall form calls to mind a modest-sized stegodont, a cousin of today's elephants, complete with proboscis (albeit rather short), floppy ears, and long hairy-tipped tail. Moreover, a dwarf, buffalo-sized species of stegodont, *Stegodon florensis*, is known to have survived on the island of Flores, just east of Java, until as recently as 12,000 years ago – so could a comparable form have existed on Java too, and lingered even longer there, right into historical times? Sadly, we will probably never know, for the lost, forgotten sukotyro is today just as intangible as its literary, fictional doppelgänger, the tusked megalopedus. FT

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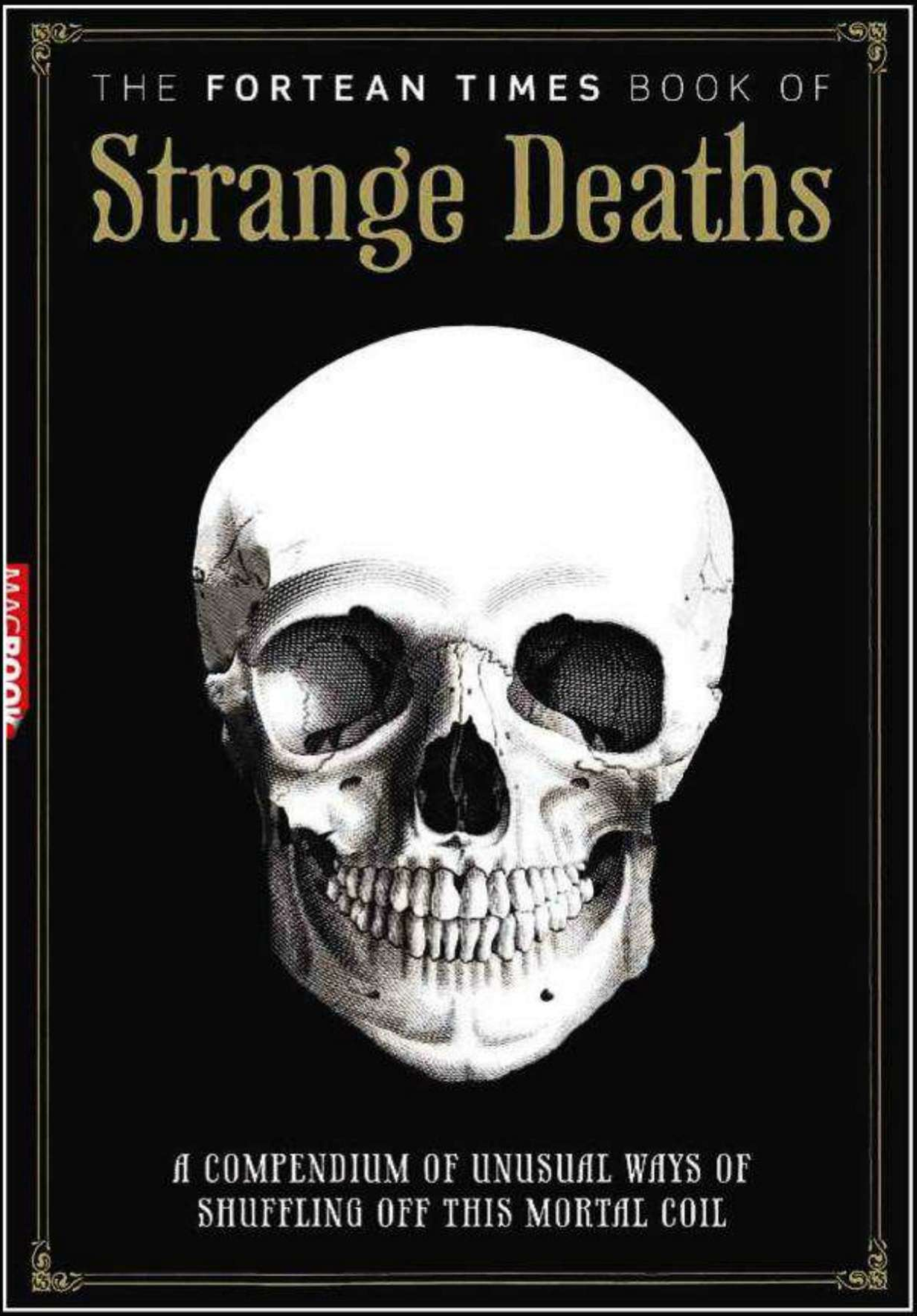
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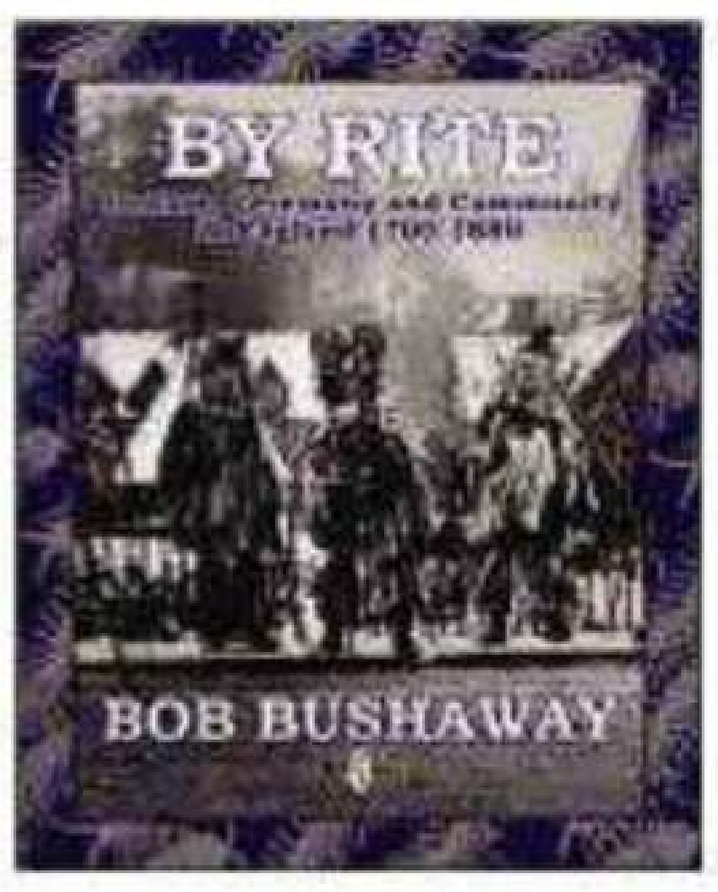
reviews

Nowt as strange as folk(lore)

Leftie folklorists will enjoy this seminal, if dated, work on class in ritual, but concentrating on economic rationales leaves the fun aspect of custom unexplored



By Rite

Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700–1880

Bob Bushaway

Breviary Stuff Publications 2011

Pb, 194pp, illus, notes, ind, £14.00,
ISBN 9780956482761

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.00

In 1982, *By Rite* injected the concept of class war into English folklore studies, arguing that customs and rituals should be interpreted in the context of social tensions and conflicts between classes.

The author looks at how an economy centred upon a seasonal calendar and customary obligations was extinguished by an exclusionary system of land ownership and private contractual obligations. Resources previously shared with the rural population and celebrated in seasonal customs were lost in enclosures. Conflicts inevitably developed between land-owning élites and the landless poor, with folk customs providing a battleground and a way of mediating the strife. The poor invoked ancient rights and traditions – real or imagined – as justification for their actions or to obtain economic benefits. Often rewards were paltry, such as the alms given to carol singers and folk dancers in winter, or the gleanings picked up after harvest. Some customs, involving temporary suspensions of normal protections afforded to property and person, merely legitimised demanding food or money with menaces during seasonal hardship. In Dorset in the early 19th century, the practice of 'lent-crocking' extracted pancakes from respectable homes under threat of bombardment by crockery. Other customs threatened personal dignity, such as the custom of forcibly lifting up members of the opposite sex, observed over Easter. Around 1850, a Lancashire clergyman only avoided being borne aloft by "three or four lusty women rushing into his room" by paying them off.

Seasonal fairs and maypoles could become rallying points, providing opportunities for the rural poor to express grievances. Early farm mechanisation led to outbreaks of disorder in 1830–31, with the author detecting customary elements within the 'Captain Swing' disturbances. Guy Fawkes rituals easily spilled over into anarchy. Bonfire Night was the one time when the citizenry could detonate explosives in public, a prospect which alarmed the ruling elites then as it does now. Many other boisterous folk celebrations were suppressed for encouraging rowdiness, with Victorian reformers purging them of vulgar elements or re-inventing them in watered-down formats, such as harvest festivals.

Bob Bushaway demystifies many customs which generations of folklorists enthusiastically interpreted as 'survivals' of pagan rituals, arguing "the social and economic function of folk custom were of greater significance to the labouring poor than were memories of past religious systems". Bushaway's detailed analysis of many seasonal customs may be said to have brought the subject into the domain of legitimate historical scholarship. As a result, *By Rite* has earned praise from historians such as EP Thompson and Ronald Hutton.

> **"rituals should be interpreted in the context of social tensions and class conflict"**

Certainly, the author's class tension and struggle analysis fits very well with some aspects of folk tradition – feudal doles, wood gathering, boundary disputes and customs-as-protests. On these, Bushaway is excellent, having trawled archives, old newspapers and law reports to recover a wealth of material. But concerning large swathes of folkloric territory he is silent. Concentration on economic functions leaves little to say on Christmas customs and nothing whatever about Hallowe'en. Omitted is how customs satisfied a myriad of personal needs and feelings. Customs provided ways of letting off steam, settling old scores, or being the centre of attention when indulging in fantasy role play by dressing up as mummers and horn dancers; all within a countryside containing numerous rituals practised as people fell in love, married, had children, kept pets, grew vegetables, watched the weather, sang songs, told stories, saw fairies and ghosts, practised magic, fell ill and died. Above all, folk customs provided a timeless form of collective fun.

Furthermore, for a book critical of 'survival' notions, *By Rite* fails to explain why some customs survived or have even been revived, long after any economic rationales vanished. Examples include straw bear festivals in the eastern counties, and Plough Monday celebrations at Balsham, Cambridgeshire, where in early January office workers clutching mobile phones traipse around modern housing estates bawling, "Pity the poor plough boys!".

Doubtless this Marxian-style critique was more compelling in 1982, when nearly half the governments of Europe carried communist labels; the author cites the early Karl Marx and not the later, who viewed peasants as reactionary. But one might equally make the case for our agrarian past being a history of class collaboration. Political motives can be detected in customs, but as often as not linked with reactionary causes endorsing the existing order, hereditary monarchy and Protestant triumphalism. Oak Apple Day (29 May) commemorates the semi-mythic deliverance of Charles II, and Bonfire Night, the smashing of a Catholic-inspired terror plot and the survival of a Protestant witch-hunting king.

However, with Marx reduced in intellectual terms to the status of an old man in red with a big white beard coming down the chimney once a year (whom adults don't believe in), the ultimately economic analysis of folklore contained in *By Rite* appears dated, like our perceptions of many customs. This re-issue is an ideal present for any left-wing friend with a serious interest in folklore.

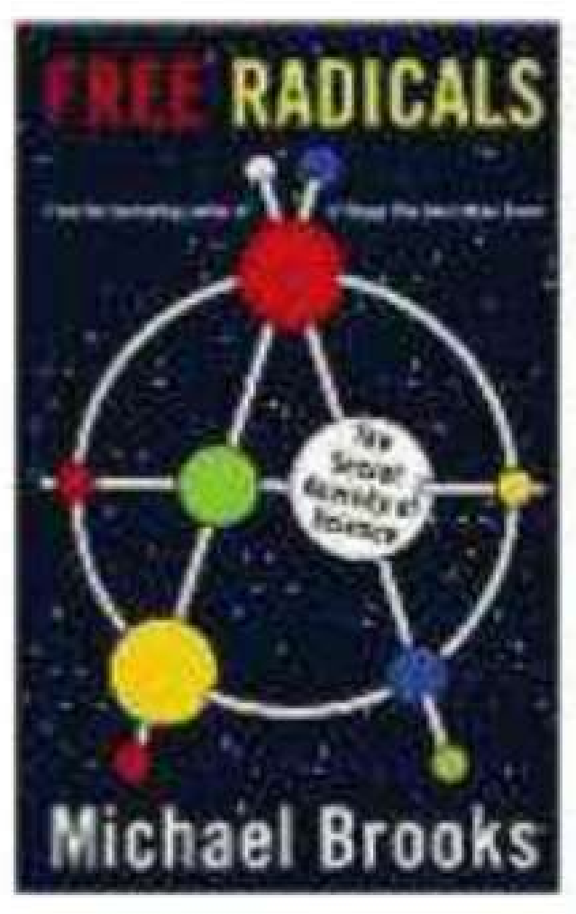
Alan Murdie

Fortean Times Verdict

INTERESTING, BUT TAKES THE FUN OUT OF FOLKLORE 7

Damned data

Scientific progress often emerges from cheating, lies, drugs and dreams



Free Radicals

The Secret Anarchy of Science

Michael Brooks

Profile Books 2011
Pb, 311pp, notes, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781846684050
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99

In early August, Jake Davis (known online as 'Topiary') appeared on the front pages of a number of newspapers accused of being a member of the LulzSec cracker group and of involvement in computer-related offences including posting an article on the News International servers claiming that Rupert Murdoch was dead. The pallid, autistic, Neo-lookalike teenager was carrying a copy of Michael Brooks's *Free Radicals: The Secret Anarchy of Science*, which promptly shot up to 182 in the Amazon UK bestsellers list.

The appeal of the book was probably that it explores the anti-authoritarian streak displayed by many respected scientists. Instead of the hackneyed image of disinterested men and women plugging away with no thought of personal glory, Brooks revels in a parade of egomaniacal Alpha-geeks who are in it to win it and are determined to succeed at any price. British biologist and Nobel laureate Paul Feyerabend, who went public with this anything-goes philosophy, was declared "the worst enemy of science", but he was only telling the truth: Isaac Newton's biographer Simon Westfall recognises Newton's deliberately fraudulent writing (he talks of "a cloud of exquisitely powdered fudge", but remains in awe of the man), a habit he shared with Galileo; and Albert Einstein ignored results that contradicted his theories – not so much "damned data" as "to hell with data". As Brooks says, he was "a perfect example of the character that will produce great science and think nothing of the misdemeanours that such breakthroughs demand". In 2006, *Nature Cell Biology* complained that a fifth of the papers submitted included dodgy data, and a third of the respondents to a 2005 *Nature* survey put their hands up to at least one transgression. Ethicist Frederick Grinnell suggested that intuition may well be the best way of separating data and noise, and dropping data points because of gut feeling might be justifiable.

Not all the breakthroughs described here were the result of shoehorning facts to fit theories. There were also scientists whose inspiration was fuelled by drugs – Ritalin and LSD being particular favourites – vivid dreams and, in the case of Leonardo da Vinci's old mate Girolama Cardano, angels and demons – he cheerfully described himself as a lunatic. The electric motor owes a lot to Nikola Tesla's hallucinated image of a ring of whirling electromagnets, and the development of the atomic bomb to Omar Snyder and Enrico Fermi's watercooler moments.

And if none of these worked, there was always "vigorous and continuing promotion" or potentially lethal experiments on their own bodies.

It's all good anecdotal fun, requires no background knowledge and is written with brio, but I take exception (on several levels) to the misuse of the word 'anarchist'. I suppose 'sociopath' for some of Brooks's subjects and 'doolally' for others sounded much less appealing.

William Darragh

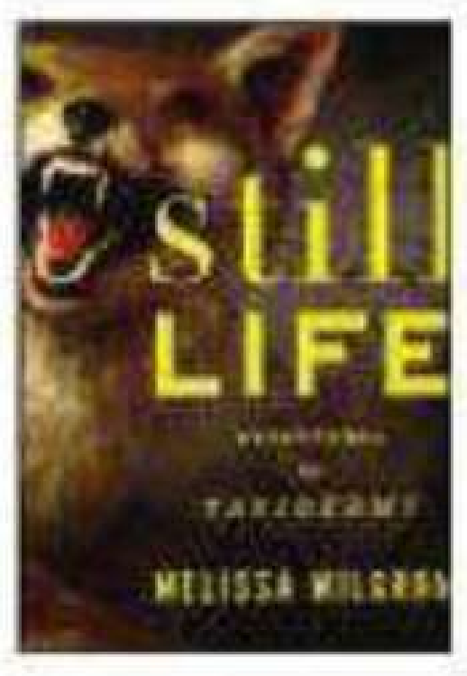
Fortean Times Verdict
AMUSING TALES OF BOFFINS BEHAVING BADLY **6**

Still Life

Adventures in Taxidermy

Melissa Milgrom

Mariner Books 2011
Pb, 285pp, sources, £14.95/$14.95, ISBN 9780547395708
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.95



For many of my generation of biologists, genes and molecular biology made taxidermy seem recherché, amateurish and anachronistic. I never agreed: a well-mounted specimen broadens and deepens your understanding of biology. After all, Milgrom comments, "reverential love for the species [..] consumes all great taxidermists". The different perspectives mean that 'bench' biologists can still learn much from taxidermists.

Still Life is as easy to read and as entertaining as a Sunday supplement. Milgrom tells her story with a cast of often unforgettable characters, including: the Schwendemans, a likeable father and son team; Emily Mayer, the taxidermist who works with Damien Heist; and Roy Orbison impersonator Ken Walker, who 'recreated' (entirely from parts of other animals) an Irish Elk using his hunter's insights of existent Cervidæ, cutting-edge biology and cave art. The difference between taxidermists' conventions in the USA and UK is particularly amusing.

Still Life lacks illustrations: it's like a book on Bewick without engravings or Audubon without paintings. Yet Verreaux's 'Arab Courier Attacked by Lions' remains visually stunning 142 years after the diorama first shocked Parisians. Milgrom describes the demise of Potter's Museum of Curiosities without showing 'The Death and Burial of Cock Robin' or any of the other remarkable constructions. I had to Google pictures of the modern taxidermists' art.

Illustrations would have made *Still Life* indispensible. But *Still Life* still shows that there's still life in still life.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict
GOOD, BUT MISSING THE ESSENTIAL ILLUSTRATIONS - **6**

The Great Yokai Encyclopædia

The A–Z of Japanese Monsters

Richard Freeman

CFZ Press 2010
Pb, 398pp, illus, bib, £14.95, ISBN 9781905723546
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.95

Before reading this book, I knew of Japan's *yōkai*. I had even written about a few of them, so the tortoise-shelled aquatic *kappa*, the Toblerone-shaped *tsuchinoko* snake, Japanese dragons, birdmen, the sly *tanuki* (shape-shifting raccoon dog), the vampire cats and female were-spiders, the multi-tailed *kitsune* or fox spirits, and (my favourite) the tapir-headed nightmare-devouring *baku* were not new to me. But Richard Freeman's is the first *yōkai* encyclopædia in English.

Much of its source material is in Japanese (though Wikipedia provides some details), so I dread to think how much work went into its preparation. I would have liked the sources of the original illustrations to have been identified. Otherwise, I have only praise for a fascinating work which fills a gap in the literature.

The chances are that there is a *yōkai* for every way in which a human can be captured, torn apart and devoured. You will find rubbery green-skinned ghost turtles, bloodsucking trees, disembodied faces that walk on two arms, gigantic corpse-consuming rabbits, bull-headed monster crabs, flaming pigs that steal human genitals, marine snails that transform into beautiful women, a stomach-inhabiting triple-antenna'ed fox and a yellow spleen-inhabiting dog-faced slug, an immense earthquake eel carrying the whole of Japan upon its back, and the *hitome*, an enormous disembodied eye.

How can any cryptozoologist or zoomythologist not be impressed by the *atsuuikakura* – a huge, flesh-eating sea cucumber that grows from discarded knickers?

Karl Shuker

Fortean Times Verdict
WEIRD JAPANESE MONSTERS FOR ANGLOPHONES **8**

Neutrino

Frank Close

Oxford University Press 2010
Hb, 181pp, illus, notes, ind, £9.99/$18.95, ISBN 9780199574599
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

Neutrinos are the strangest of all the subatomic particles. Billions stream through our bodies without us being aware of them; they are indifferent to solid matter. Detecting them involves thousands of gallons of dry-cleaning fluid in a deep, isolated mine, or several cubic kilometres of the Antarctic icecap. They may partly exist in extra dimensions and be able to travel back in time. Very weird.

In *Neutrino*, noted physicist Frank Close looks through the prism of the lives of those most closely bound up with the particle, particularly Ray Davies, Bruno Pontecorvo and John Bahcall, catching some of what made *The Strangest Man* (Graham Farmelo's book on Dirac) such winning science writing. He loses some of Farmelo's sense of time and place because of concentrating on more than one person, but is better able to follow the chain of discovery.

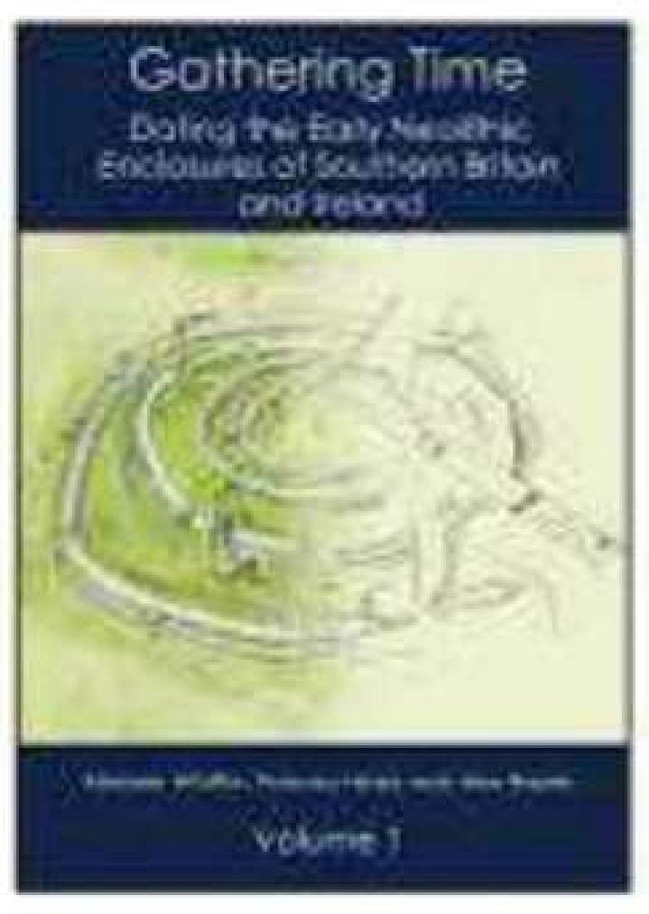
Neutrinos are so fleeting that they almost don't exist. They were discovered primarily because of a problem with radioactive beta decay, which Wolfgang Pauli, the founding father of quantum physics, was exploring in 1930. He realised that the only way the decay could take place was if it was throwing off a particle of minuscule mass and no charge. Few believed him, and the particle remained undetected until 'Project Poltergeist' in the 1950s. Since then, they've proved vital in understanding how the Sun works, have proved to be the fingerprint of a supernova, blasted out at the speed of light as a dying star caved in on itself, and have become a science fiction trope. It's amazing how interesting something that's almost not there can be.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict
FASCINATING AND DEEPLY WEIRD SCIENCE, WELL WRITTEN **8**

Digging into Bayes

How the work of a Presbyterian minister is revolutionising archæology and rewriting the history of the British Isles



Gathering Time

Dating the Early Neolithic Enclosures of Southern Britain and Ireland

Alasdair Whittle, Frances Healy & Alex Baylis

Oxbow Books 2011
Hb, 2 vols, 992p, £45.00, ISBN 9781842174258
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £45.00

When Presbyterian minister Thomas Bayes solved the mathematical problem of 'inverse probability' in the 18th century, his interest was largely philosophical. Since the advent of computers, Bayes's Theorem has found countless applications in statistics, medicine and spam-filtering; the latest is in archæological dating.

Gathering Time reports the results of a huge dating programme which is set to revolutionise archæology and re-write the Early Neolithic in Britain. Several thousand radiocarbon (RC) dates from 38 enclosure sites across Britain have been analysed, producing chronologies of previously unimagined accuracy. RC dating, even when calibrated against tree-ring data, produces a 'scatter' of calendar dates that can span many centuries; Bayesian statistics can refine these into steps of around 25 years – just one human generation – or even less.

The Bayesian dates are expressed as probabilities; the broader their span, the higher the probability. So the excavation date of the first ditch to be dug at the Windmill Hill enclosure is given as "3700–3640 cal BC (95% probability), probably in 3680–3650 cal BC (68% probability)". Dates are given for the start and end of construction of each site in the study, usually considering its various components separately.

Windmill Hill's three concentric earthworks are now known to have been dug in an odd sequence: first the inner ditch, then the outer, finally the middle. The entire process took around 50 years. The enclosure continued to be used for over 300 years, yet other sites were abandoned after only a generation or so. From all this detail emerges a fascinating picture of how rapidly the Neolithic revolution swept westwards across southern Britain from its origins in Kent, taking only a couple of centuries to reach Ireland and the north of Scotland.

Gathering Time runs to almost a thousand pages and is divided into two substantial volumes; volume one is the heaviest and after a whole day of reading it I was developing tendonitis. Although it is unashamedly academic and written in a cautious, peer-review style, the book is extremely readable, even to a layman such as myself. There are aspects I find irritating, such as quotations in French that are not translated. The term *terminus post quem* is used repeatedly, rather than 'maximum age'. Surely the English version would be preferable, if only to save ink? The Bayesian technique unfortunately requires details of every single RC sample to be recorded for future scrutiny: consequently much of the book's bulk, particularly in volume one, is taken up with endless tables of data. This is unavoidable though, and partly offset by the many excellent illustrations and maps.

In volume two, there are lengthy and superbly written appraisals of the evidence. British archæology tends to be quite insular, but here is a rare and detailed examination of the Neolithic in Europe, from where it originated. I found this volume very hard to put down, despite the weight.

This book marks the start of a new chapter in archæology and raises wider issues. RC dating is destructive and requires a good supply of samples, ideally bone; some of the samples used in this study were human bones that have been stored unseen in museum drawers since their collection long ago. It is therefore worrying that a Druid campaign to rebury prehistoric remains should have started up just as the bones finally begin to yield their secrets, and that such demands are taken seriously. Britain's museums are already bursting with finds and even major excavations are often not written up for many years, if at all.

Gathering Time demonstrates just how much new information can be gleaned from work that was done even a century ago. For archæologists, digging holes must be much more fun than a lot of tedious number crunching, but should so many holes still be dug? Maybe archæologists should not be allowed out to play until they have done their homework.

Stephen Toase

Fortean Times Verdict
FASCINATING – OPENS A NEW CHAPTER IN ARCHÆOLOGY **8**

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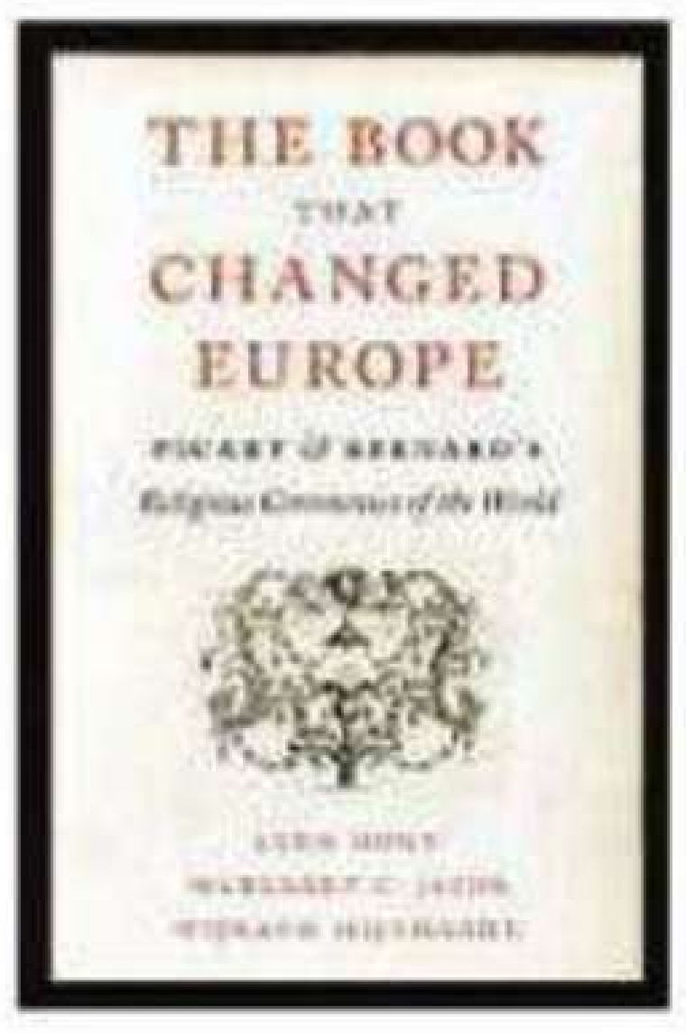
A tolerant revolution

A eulogy to the Calvinist trailblazers who expounded the phenomenology of religion two centuries before it was invented



The Book That Changed Europe

Picart & Bernard's *Religious Ceremonies of the World*

Lynn Hunt, Margaret C Jacob and Wijnand Mijnhardt

Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2010
Hb, 383pp, £24.95/$32.95, illus, notes, ind, ISBN 9780674049284
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £24.95

In 1723, the first of seven volumes of a work called *Religious Ceremonies of the World* was published by two French Calvinists living in The Netherlands. The author and publisher was Jean Frederic Bernard, and the books, totalling over 3,000 pages, were lavishly illustrated with 250 plates of engravings by Bernard Picart. The title of academics Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt's study reflects just how ground-breaking Bernard and Picart's work was.

It can genuinely be described as the first real work of comparative religion in Europe. "Unlike most of his predecessors, who quickly seized upon the strange and violent aspects of other cultures, Picart tried to depict the kaleidoscope of the world's religious activities from the inside, from the point of view of the religious tradition in question, however difficult that might have been," the authors say.

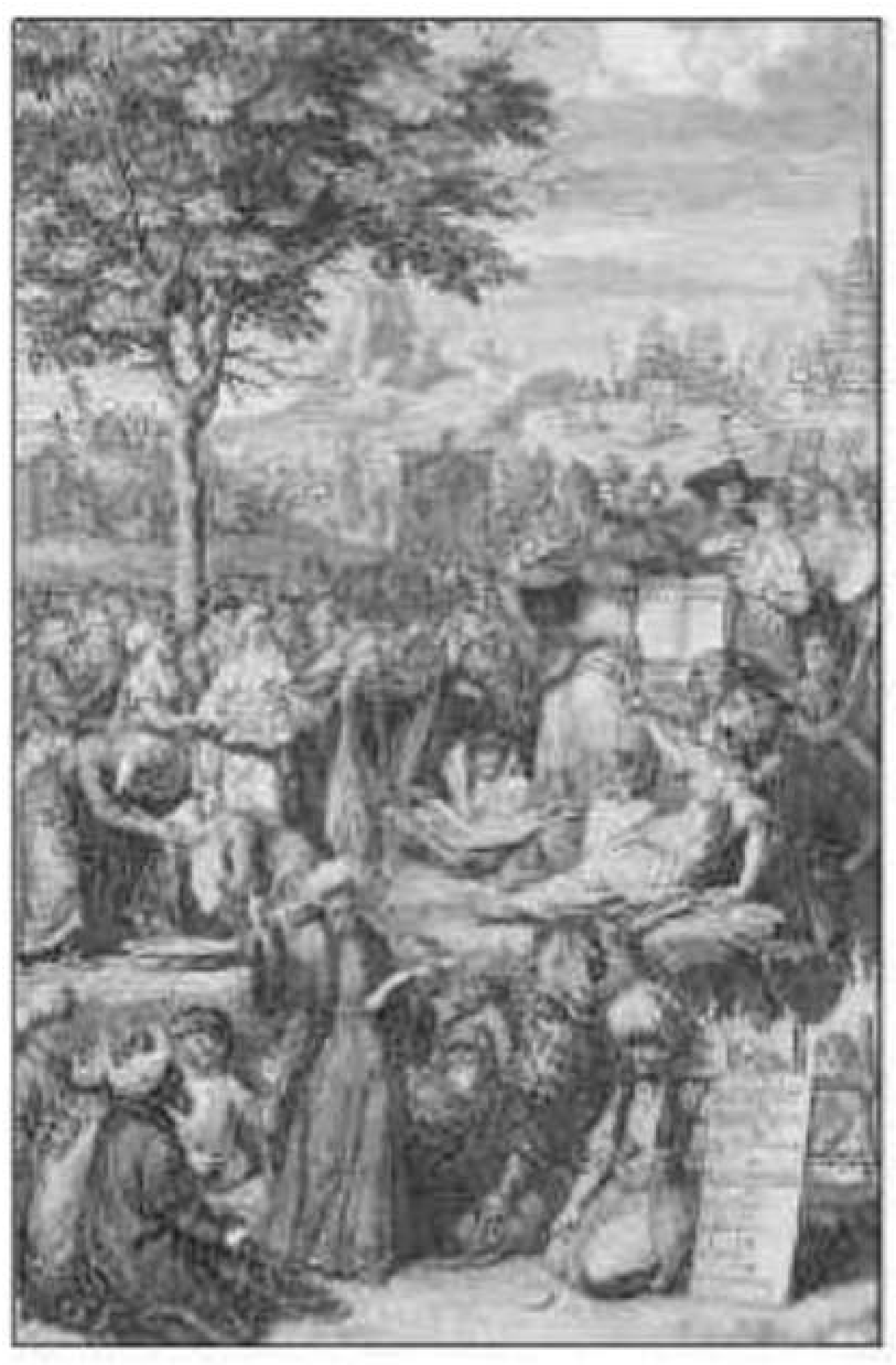
In the first half, 'The World of the Book', they examine its context, the world in which its creators lived: "*Religious Ceremonies of the World* cannot be understood apart from Bernard and Picart's own experience of religious intolerance and persecution."

Today writing about other religions can bring flak and occasionally lawsuits; but for Bernard and Picart it was potentially far more dangerous.

In France, Louis XIV persecuted Catholic dissidents such as the Jansenists and Quietists, while "even in post-1689 England, Catholics, Jews and non-Anglican Protestants were barred from public office and university positions, and across Europe Catholic authorities still denounced 'tolerationism' as undermining the true religion". Bernard and Picart, the authors say, had to watch their step.

Instead of insisting on a single point of view, "they invited readers to distance themselves from their own beliefs and customs and to think about religious practices around the globe. This distance marked a crucial first step toward toleration."

And this is why their work was so revolutionary: "Everyday attitudes had to change for religious tolerance to take root. People had to understand and to some extent sympathise with different religious practices they had been taught to think of as profane and deviant, if not monstrous. Bernard and Picart aimed to produce just this kind of understanding."



Part Two, 'The Book of the World', examines the book's main religious themes: Judaism, Catholicism, Idolatry in the West and East, Islam and finally Dissent, Deism and Atheism.

Bernard's text "did not distinguish between true and false religion, between Christians and non-Christians, or even between religion and idolatry… he showed the universality of such ceremonial practices as music, dance, purification rites and the ritual kiss." This is pure phenomenology of religion, nearly 200 years before the discipline was created.

My only criticism of this fascinating book is that I'd like to have read more of Bernard's text rather than just a summary and discussion of it. But it does contain over 70 beautiful engravings, most of them Picart's, illustrating the remarkable detail that went into the work.

Religious Ceremonies of the World went through constant reprints and new editions, including many pirated ones; one way or another it remained in print for nearly 100 years – a remarkable accomplishment – with an expanded 12-volume edition in the early 19th century.

It's humbling for those of us who write about the varieties of religious belief today to think that Bernard and Picart were doing this nearly three centuries ago.

They were truly the trailblazers – but 300 years on we still have to battle against ignorance and prejudice. The ugliness of anti-Semitism is still with us, and the extremism of fundamentalist Islamists has created popular suspicion of even moderate Muslims.

As for new religious movements, "sects and cults", I've written many times that ignorance breeds fear which breeds prejudice which breeds antagonism and persecution.

I raise a glass to Jean Frederic Bernard and Bernard Picart for their ground-breaking work in dispelling religious ignorance.

David V Barrett

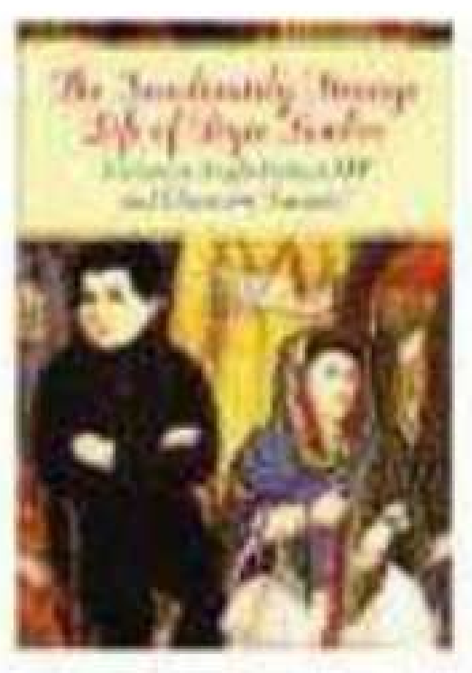
Fortean Times Verdict
A TRIBUTE TO A REMARKABLE WORK OF UNDERSTANDING **9**

The Inordinately Strange Life of Dyce Sombre

Victorian Anglo-Indian MP and Chancery "Lunatic"

Michael H Fisher

Hurst and Company 2010
Pb, 396 pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9781849040006
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £18.99



During his short life, Col David Occhterlony Dyce Sombre (1808–1851) became adopted grandson to the ruler of a small Indian state, cashed out the principality and then went on a spending spree. Along the way, he married the daughter of a viscount, bought an election to Parliament and was declared mad. His wife's family and the Lord High Chancellor took care of most of Sombre's tremendous fortune during five inquisitions into his mental competence.

Sombre was perhaps the unfortunate victim of time, place, class and differing opinion on the definition of "lunacy". Or maybe he was just thoroughly repugnant.

Author Michael Fisher's intent is to "illuminate larger issues in Asia and Europe", particularly changing definitions of race and mental health; judged a lunatic in England, Sombre was repeatedly judged sane in Europe, where he spent most of the remainder of his life, battling to regain his fantastic wealth.

Many said that his peculiarities were typical of India. From Fisher's exhaustive research, however, it's clear that Somber suffered addiction, chronic venereal disease, and was frankly a lout; his diary, written in multiple languages, recounts many encounters, even in the throes of gonorrhea, with prostitutes and others he "wanted" at the moment.

Was he the victim of prejudice and injustice, an angry man of many lusts or merely mad? It appears that he was likely all. This is a fine biography of a footnote character in global history.

Jay Rath

Fortean Times Verdict
MAD, BAD AND DANGEROUS TO KNOW – OR NOT, POSSIBLY **8**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

TIME LOOPS AND SPACE TWISTS

Fred Alan Wolf

Hierophant Publishing (hierophantpublishing.com) 2010
Hb, pp289, index, bib, notes, illus, £20.99
ISBN 9780981877136

The book's subtitle – "How God Created the Universe" – seems unnecessarily presumptuous but turns out not to be gratuitous. Wolf taught physics at the University of London's Birkbeck College, where he discussed the subject matter of this book with the great quantum physicist David Bohm. In essence, this is a meditation on the command of the Biblical Deity "Let there be light!" The presentation is more New Age than academic paper, mixing mathematics and physics with Hindu Vedic and Judæo-Christian cosmology in a manner that pays tribute to another lauded physicist, Richard Feynman. In explaining how everything – including, it seems, time and space – is made of light, Wolf leads the reader through some pretty daunting material, but he has the patience and humour to make much of it fairly painless. Even so, it is heavy going; but it's important to understand, he says, because it shows how science can illuminate spirituality and even provide some insight into paranormal phenomena (or rather, phenomena that seem paranormal at this stage of our understanding).

FARMER BUCKLEY'S EXPLODING TROUSERS

Stephanie Pain, ed

Profile Books (profilebooks.com) 2011
Pb, pp213, index, £8.99
ISBN 9781846685088

This highly entertaining and enlightening miscellany – drawn from Pain's 'Histories' column in *New Scientist* – takes a wry look in the opposite direction to science's great and famous discoveries, championing the "people and events that are all but forgotten, but shouldn't be". For example, read about the first, crazy attempt to develop a new technique of anæsthesia by injecting cocaine directly into the spinal cord – "After 45 minutes the effect... began to wear off [and] the two surgeons, one missing a significant amount of cerebrospinal fluid, the other battered, burnt and suffering from serious stab wounds, went out to dinner". Among the 50 such bizarre moments of discovery we learn how a jumble of 190 fragments of a third-century Chinese scroll was reconstructed as the oldest known work on mathematics; marvel at the endurance feats of the trireme rowers of old Athens; and gasp at those mad enough to ascend to airless heights in rickety balloons or to be lowered into volcanoes to make unique observations. There is also a convincing explanation of how Charles Dawson – in the frame for faking the Piltdown Skull – might have made Brighton Museum's famous 'toad in the hollow flintstone'. Presented as short pieces, this is an excellent book for casual dipping.

UFO DOWN

Andy Roberts

CFZ Press (cfz.org.uk/) 2010
Pb, pp108, £8.99
ISBN 9781905723607

Called by some 'Britain's Roswell', a major UFO event occurred on the night of 23 January 1974, in the Berwyn Mountains of North Wales. Our own Andy Roberts, a veteran researcher into and analyst of ufological, fortean and folkloric topics, has spent years investigating the background to this story. The initial theories concerned the coincidence of a meteor strike and an earth tremor; these gave way to more fanciful ideas involving UFOs, secret agencies and government conspiracy. Over the years, as Roberts details here, the facts were gradually established and his own ideas determined that this was a glorious case of misidentification and misunderstanding – a conclusion for which he has been pilloried as a 'debunker' and 'MI5 agent'. The case has featured in Robert's own UnCon talk and article (**FT252:30–35**), but here he collates his and others' researches into as definitive a statement on the affair as possible. He also notes that *FT* "holds the honour of being the first printed source other than the local and national press" (see **FT3:16**).

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE SOUL

Patrick Harpur

Rider Books (rbooks.co.uk) 2010
Pb, pp240, index, bib, refs, £9.99
ISBN 9781846041860

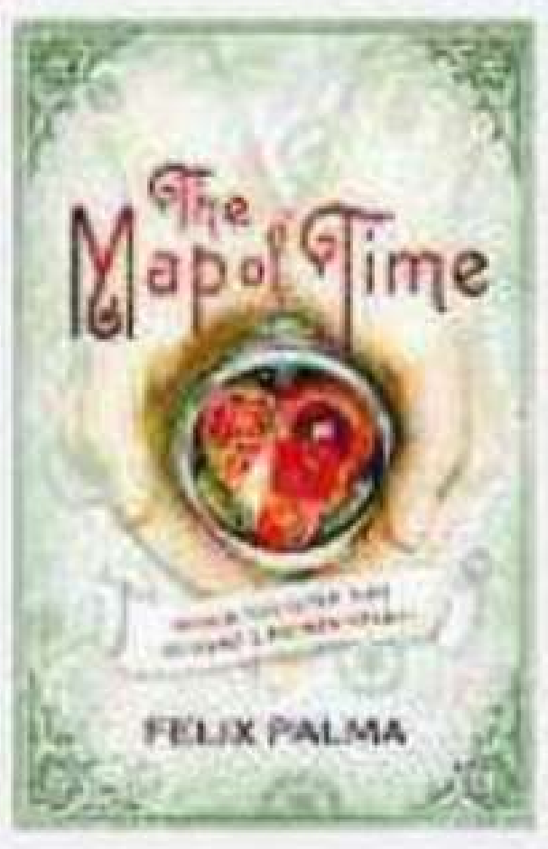
Who am I? Where am I going when I die? Does existence have a purpose? If you're puzzled by life's big questions, you could do no better than try Patrick Harpur's 'guide for the perplexed'. Here he explains, in deceptively clear and strangely gripping passages, probably everything you have ever wondered about with regard to the Soul, an ethereal entity which we are all supposed to possess and about which we know absolutely nothing (except for certain enlightened ones, of course). Chapters discuss the Soul in relation to a number of different aspects and theories: body, psyche, world-soul, mana, the unconscious, myth, daimon, spirit, ego, initiation, afterlife, and otherworld. Harpur is an erudite philosopher who reveals how these ideas can restore a sense of meaning and perspective to our lives. Highly recommended for all, not just navel-gazers and hippies.

FORTEAN FICTION

The Map of Time

Félix J Palma

HarperCollins, 2011
Pb, 514pp, £12.99
ISBN 9780007344123



Time travel novels have been at the heart of science fiction since HG Wells's *The Time Machine*, so it's fitting that Wells should be the connecting thread between the three parts of this astonishing novel set largely in a brilliantly realised 1896 London.

Andrew Harrington, rich, upper-class and spoilt, is still heartbroken eight years after his lover Marie Kelly, a Whitechapel prostitute, was killed by Jack the Ripper. About to commit suicide, he is persuaded instead to go to Murray's Time Travel to try to change the past and save her. But their Cronotilus can only go forward, specifically to one date in the year 2000, when the brave Captain Shackleton finally defeats the evil automata who had taken over the world. Murray suggests that he visit HG Wells, who must surely have the machine he wrote about in his recent novel – and so he has, enabling Harrington to travel back to the night the Ripper killed his lover.

In part two, Claire Haggerty, out of step with the constrictions of late-Victorian society, is determined to escape to the future; she meets Shackleton, the dashing man of her dreams, first in 2000 then in 1896, and again Wells is drawn in to help them send their love letters across time.

Of course all is not as it seems, but to reveal more would spoil the reading of this wonderfully imagined, beautifully written (and translated from the Spanish) and delightfully complex tale. Suffice to say that in the third part HG Wells is the central character and finds himself, along with Bram Stoker and Henry James, caught up in time paradoxes to kill for...

David V Barrett

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Rise of the Planet of the Apes

Dir Rupert Wyatt, US 2011
On UK release from 11 Aug

Set in present-day San Francisco, the first half of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* displays refreshing nerve in its carefully considered and extended exposition of events, which allows the story to unfold at just the right pace. James Franco's Dr Rodman is at the centre of research into genetically enhanced intelligence – a cure for Alzheimer's, no less. Come the great unveiling, the prize specimen runs amok across the boardroom table, leaving the doctor looking the prize chimp. The test specimens are exterminated – all but genetically enhanced baby Caesar, that is, taken home and raised by Dr Rodman, who lives with his Alzheimer's sufferer father (John Lithgow). Director Rupert Wyatt creates great pathos and humour in this part of the film, aided by Andy Serkis, as the model for Caesar's FX manifestation, and the Joe Letteri-helmed WETA Digital working seamless CGI magic. Questions of nature and nurture are touched upon and played out brilliantly upon Caesar's sophisticated visage, with some cursory exploration in the script into what happens when mankind plays God. The model here is not so much the recent *Splice* but a far older source: *Frankenstein*. Any elements of anthropomorphic sentimentality are cut through by the callous cruelty of humankind on display in the name of science and personal gain.

However, this is also part of the film's problem: the evolutionary dice are loaded against the brutish humans from the beginning. We are never in any doubt, for example, that the retirement centre for assorted primates, run by a surly Brian Cox (in one of his effortless and seemingly endless cameos) resembles a badly-run care home being exposed on a BBC *Panorama* programme. In this segment of the film, Tom Felton's sadistic chimp-wrangler's cry of "Get your stinking paws off me, you damned dirty ape!" might fall on the deaf ears of a whole generation of cinema goers and illegal downloaders who've never seen the first (and still best) 1968 Charlton Heston *Planet of the Apes*. But it's to the film's credit that it works on these two levels of awareness: for those with foreknowledge of the originals, and for those with none at all.

There is an implacable, often compelling sense of where it is all heading, but ultimately it descends into the facile: as the apes get smarter, the humans get more stupid. And one too many close-ups of Caesar looking to camera with a passable impersonation of Damien from *The Omen*, archly breaking the Fourth Wall, weakens its highly effective first use.

Almost literally in a puff of smoke, the knuckle-scraping sentience of the apes takes a giant leap and things go, well, ape-shit: Caesar's carefully-charted personal development over a number of years is matched by assorted primates going postal overnight. This huge wallop of dramatic license really needs some *Monkey Shines* to illuminate it. These apes are ferocious, potentially terrifying, there is violent action aplenty – but with its mass audience, 12A certificate, no actual horror. The climactic battle on the Golden Gate Bridge is a stunning display of WETA wizardry, but you are asked to swallow an awful lot of smoke on that suspension bridge of disbelief. Frieda Pinto as Dr Rodman's love interest is required to do little more throughout than be the most drop-dead gorgeous vet-cum-doctor on Earth, effectively an extended cameo she carries off in her own way as effortlessly as Brian Cox does his.

All the way through I wondered: how will they eventually get us to the Statue of Liberty? Well, 20th Century Fox seem intent on playing the long game with this reboot franchise, because that question remains unanswered when all the spectacular whooping and hollering is done. Let's hope one of the film's most memorable lines – "Some things aren't meant to be changed" – doesn't come back to haunt its makers. Go to this one looking for a highly effective summer blockbuster and you won't be disappointed. Go to it in a quest for a science fiction classic and you might feel a bit short-changed.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict
SUMMER MONKEY BUSINESS IS NOT QUITE TOP SF BANANA **7**

The Fifth Element

Dir Luc Besson, US 1997
20th Century Fox, £19.99

When it first came out, Luc Besson's extravagant *The Fifth Element* proved to be something of a Marmite movie: you either loved it or hated it. To some, the film was a huge mess, with madly over-the-top performances from Gary Oldman and Chris Rock helping to undermine the spectacular visuals. Many had trouble with it because it wasn't quite what they expected, being a very French take on the big-budget American science fiction epic.

Almost 15 years on, the film is ripe for reappraisal, a process bound to be helped by this sparkling Blu-ray transfer. Whatever anyone thought of the story or the performances, *The Fifth Element* always looked spectacular, an element finally done justice here. The story might be rather convoluted, but Bruce Willis just about holds it together as the cabbie (and former special forces agent) reluctantly drawn into protecting Leeloo (Milla Jovovich), a strange young woman who falls into his flying taxi. She's the key to uniting four mystical stones needed to defend Earth from an alien attack.

Among the extras is the standout warts-and-all documentary *Discovering The Fifth Element*. Whether it's because enough time has passed, or it's just a more European view of things, this is a ruthlessly honest appraisal of the film and its creation, happy to point out where it fails as much as where it succeeds, and that's refreshing. Surprisingly, this film has improved with age, so if you hated it first time around, this is a good opportunity to take another look.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict
LOOKS GREAT, BUT MAY STILL BE AN ACQUIRED TASTE **7**

Prowl

Dir Patrik Syversen, US 2010
After Dark Originals, £15.99/£17.99

When a group of sick-makingly good-looking teenagers (who appear, in fact, to be in their late-20s) willingly allow themselves to be locked into the back of a container truck by a complete stranger, you really have *no idea* of the massacre that is about to follow. No idea at all…

Prowl is a fairly unoriginal mash-up of hitchhiker, snuff movie and vampire genres. Only you're not supposed to know they're vampires until fairly late on in the film. And you'd never guess, because director Patrik Syversen has trashed everything we thought we knew about vampires and turned them into rabid daywalkers who don't *need* blood, they just like it. Oh, and vampirism isn't transmitted by bite, but by birth, apparently, and its victims age at the same speed as mortals. Surely, the appeal of vampires relies on their nocturnal, eternal, and elitist characteristics, and on the fact that – for all their aristocratic superiority – they are plagued by an infernal thirst and the indignity of having to be joyless parasites.

Good vampire movies have continued to offer us different takes on the legend – compare *Interview With the Vampire* with *30 Days of Night* for two valid and interesting approaches; but *Prowl*'s vampires are charmless, unpleasant creatures you'd rather avoid. They're not going to outwit you, psychologically torture you or hover over you in your sleep; I should be grateful really, but I'm disappointed.

George Binning

Fortean Times Verdict

NOT REALLY A VAMPIRE MOVIE, IF YOU ASK ME **3**

Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame

Dir Hark Tsui, China/Hong Kong 2010

Cine Asia, £17.99/£24.99

Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame starts off as a straightforward iteration of the genre that has been such a hit in recent years: the big budget Chinese historical epic. A new empress is to be crowned, and there are plots and schemers at court. Rebellious Dee (Andy Lau) is let out of prison to investigate a series of mysterious murders, and pulls us swiftly into martial arts and wire work jiggery-pokery, complete with a pretty swordswoman, grand, glossy sets and some patchy CGI; the sweeping shots of the palace and the fleet at harbour, in particular, look like an illustration out of a Dorling Kindersley book.

Then, Dee plunges down into an enormous subterranean cave complex and suddenly we're running round a dark gothic fantasy, a land of sorcery and monsters, transforming magicians and demonic enemies, fire beetles and deer armies. Everything is on a spectacular scale – the swooping fight sequences, the exaggerated landscapes, the extraordinary silliness. With its breathless pace, bold visuals and general sensory overload, it's no surprise that *Detective Dee* has done such storming business at the Asian box-office: this is all-out entertainment to leave the audience reeling.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict

SPECTACULAR FANTASY EPIC IS ALL-OUT ENTERTAINMENT **7**

Battle: Los Angeles

Dir Jonathan Liebesman, US 2011

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, £19.99/£24.99

The feeling that *Battle: Los Angeles* is *Black Hawk Down* with aliens is hard to ignore. A unit of US Marines is caught in a savage fight for survival in the side streets of an urban battlefield, the enemy not hostile locals but invading ETs. The handheld camera work, striving for gritty realism, instead blurs the awesome scale of some of the CGI battles, while familiar tropes of hoary sergeants striving for personal and public redemption, of boys traversing purgatorial passage into battle-hardened manhood, are manacled by lines of clunking cliché. Promisingly, the film plunges us right into the action then, fatally, backtracks 24 hours, eventually yomping back to the front again, the now helmeted men almost as tough to distinguish individually as the tantalisingly glimpsed aliens are.

Battle: Los Angeles could have been a triumphant outing but its clichéd jawing in the first half bores. When it gets back to warring in its second half, it passes muster as decent Friday night fare.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict

MORE WAR, LESS JAW WOULD HAVE HELPED THIS EFFORT **5**

SHORTS

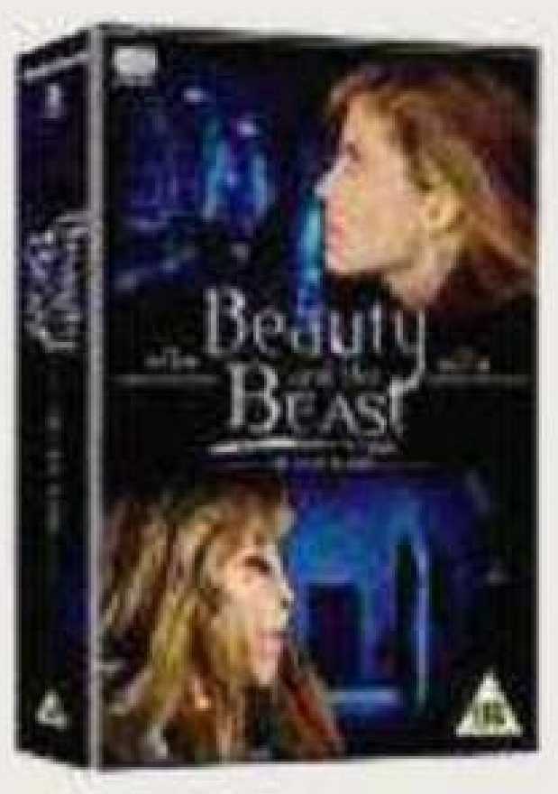
VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA: SERIES 1

(Revelation, £39.99)

Irwin Allen's various formulaic science fiction TV adventure series dominated the early 1960s, before space adventure found a new seriousness and social relevance in *Star Trek*. Allen's television factory created interchangeable high concept series set underwater (*Voyage*), in space (*Lost in Space*) or in time (*The Time Tunnel*). *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*'s first season was spun off from the 1961 movie (and was packed with recycled stock footage). Richard Basehart and David Hedison star as commanders of the high-tech submarine *Seaview*, battling foreign threats (during the Cold War) or undersea natural disasters (Jacques Cousteau was in vogue). This black-and-white first season is a more serious affair than the fantastic (even silly) later years, but it still finds room for enemy agents, defecting scientists, deadly plankton and even the Loch Ness Monster! Despite the great title sequence, imaginative logo and thrilling theme music, the actual episodes are a bit repetitive. First time around, these shows did just enough to thrill a generation with their exploration of new frontiers, and still appeal to the inner child today. **BJR 7/10**

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: THE FIRST SEASON

(Fabulous Films, £39.99)

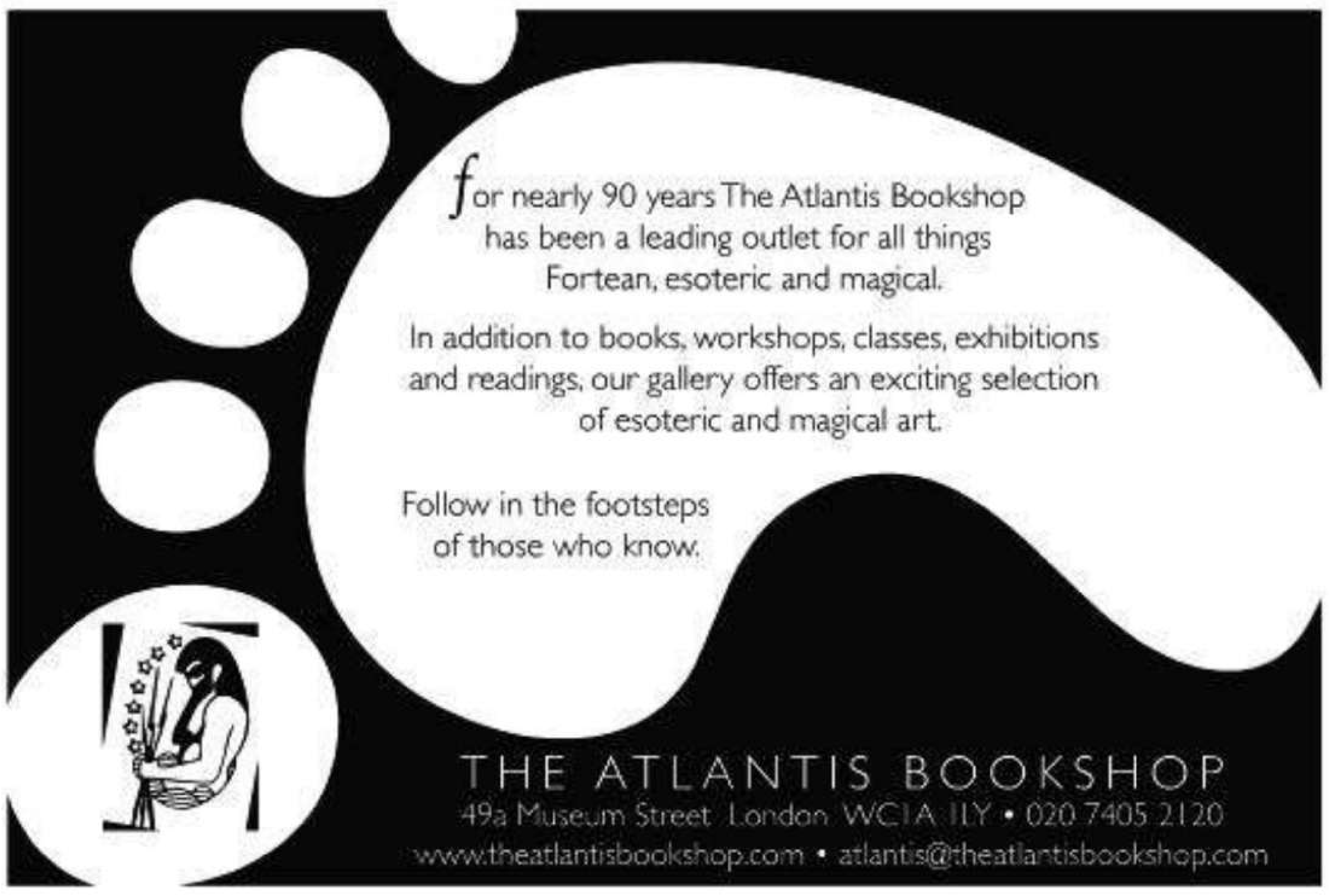


This late-1980s urban fairytale stars *Hellboy*-to-be Ron Perlman and *Terminator* survivor Linda Hamilton in an oddball romance. The leonine Vincent lives in the subway tunnels under New York, shunning human contact. When Assistant DA Catherine Chandler is attacked, Vincent comes to the rescue, taking her to his underground world governed by the benign 'Father' (Roy Dotrice). The crime-of-the-week stories are standard fare, but the developing society under New York becomes ever more fascinating as the season goes on. As well as the crime, there is romance here (of an unconventional type) with Vincent as the tall, dark and unattainable not-so-handsome hero. Lots of soft-focus moping follows. It's an interesting updating of the old legend. However, much of it has dated terribly (those fashions!), and the budget limitations are all-too-visible. A new 'making of' documentary puts things in some perspective, while a stills gallery offers plenty of cast pictures for fans to swoon over. **BJR 6/10**

FORTRESS

(Mediumrare, £14.99)

The success of TV mini-series *The Thorn Birds* (1983) led to Rachel Ward spending much of the next decade being touted as the 'next big thing'. Unfortunately, she only had one big hit, *Against All Odds* (1984) and pretty much left the industry, nearly 20 years ago, to raise a family. *Fortress* was HBO's attempt to capitalise on Ms Ward's fame by producing a low-budget horror movie, set in her native Australia, where its location will inevitably invite comparisons with *Walkabout* (1971) and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). A bored and frustrated teacher, Sally Jones (Ward), is in charge of a handful of kids (who'd rather be out huntin' 'n' fishin' than learnin'), when four masked men kidnap them and dump them in a cave. Here they remain for half the film, before escaping and turning on their captors, metamorphosing from the victims of *Deliverance* into the gleefully murderous savages of *Lord of the Flies*. With children embracing their barbaric natures and Ward running around in her underwear (a lot), this is gleefully amoral and rather good fun. **Tim Weinberg 5/10**



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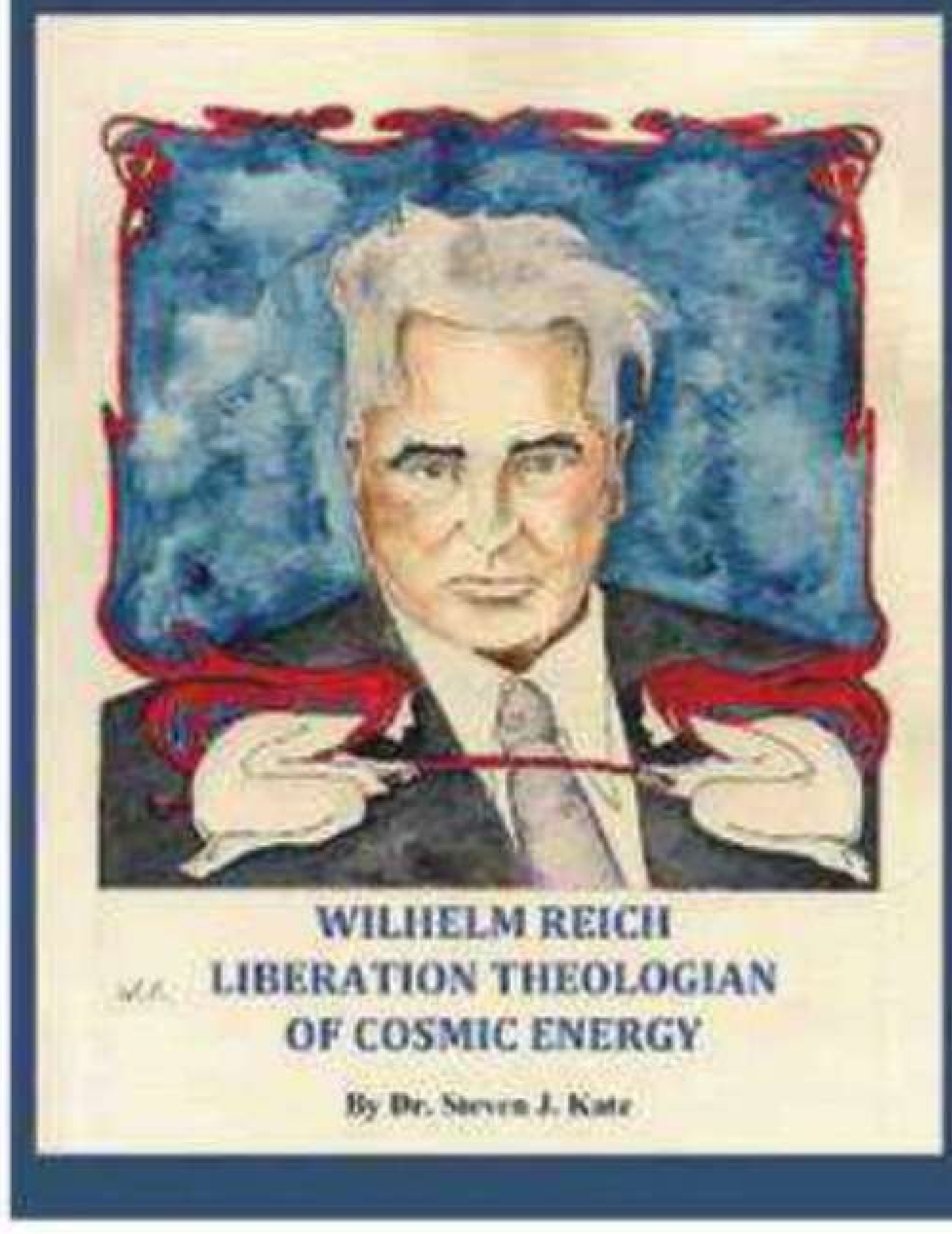

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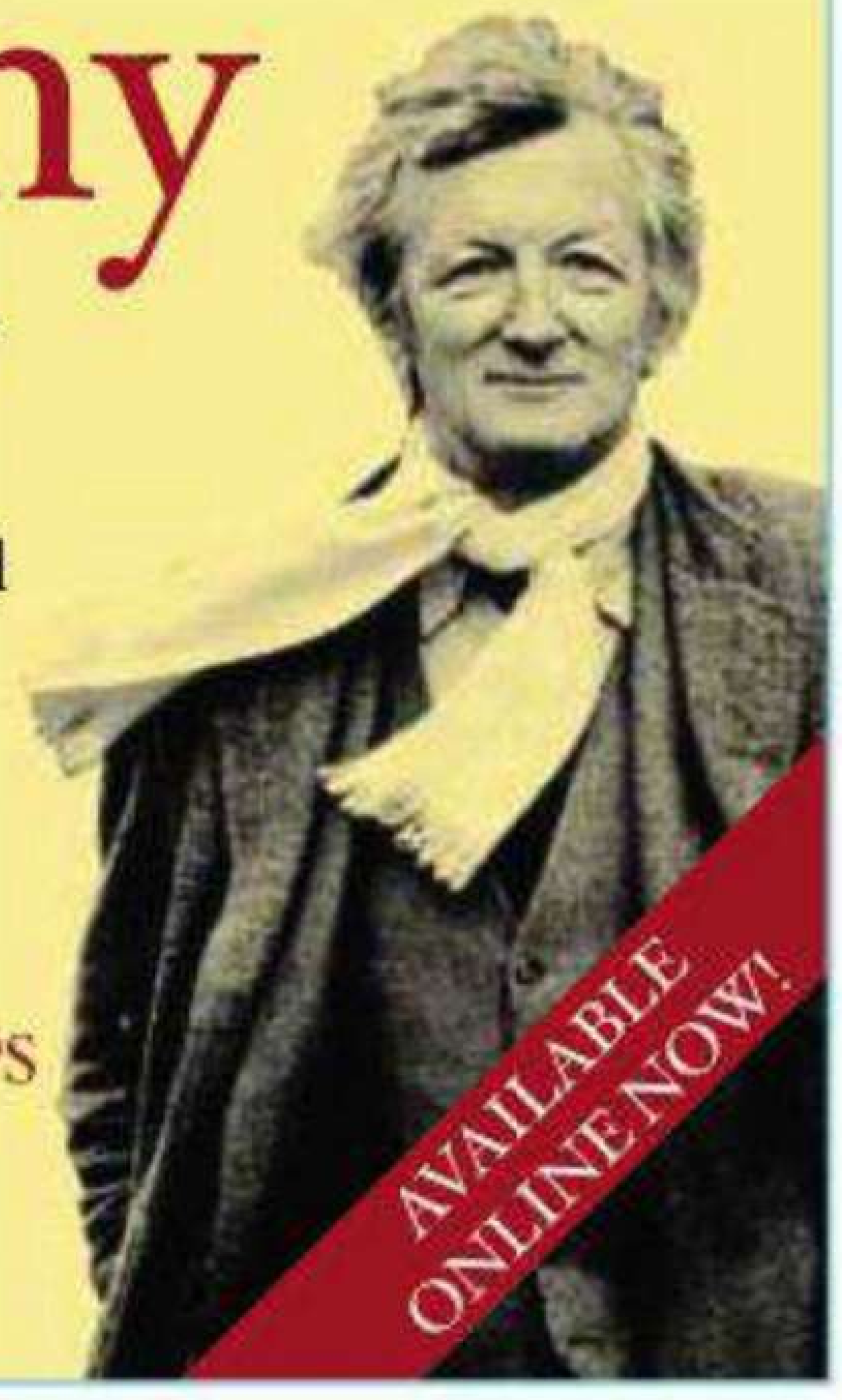

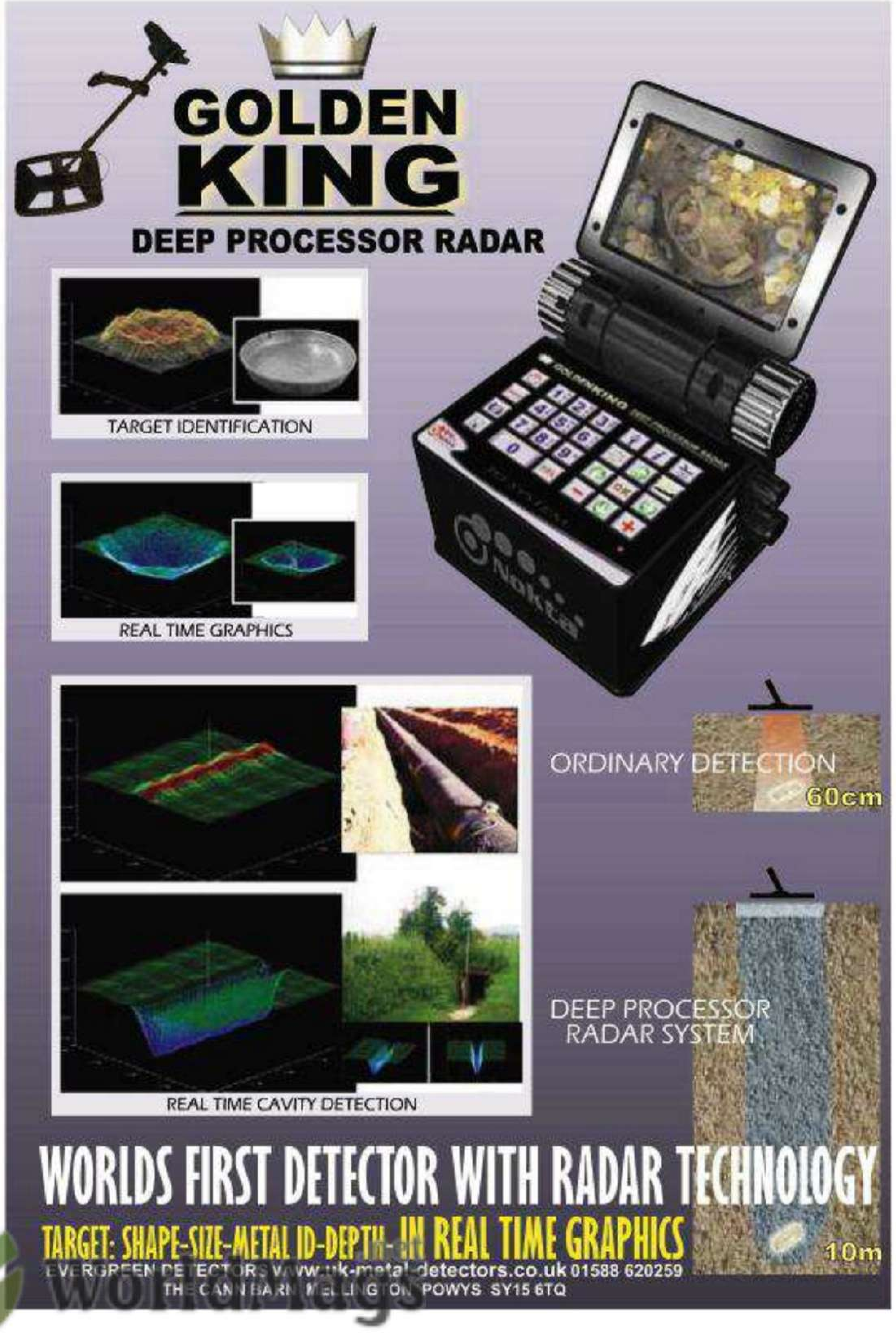

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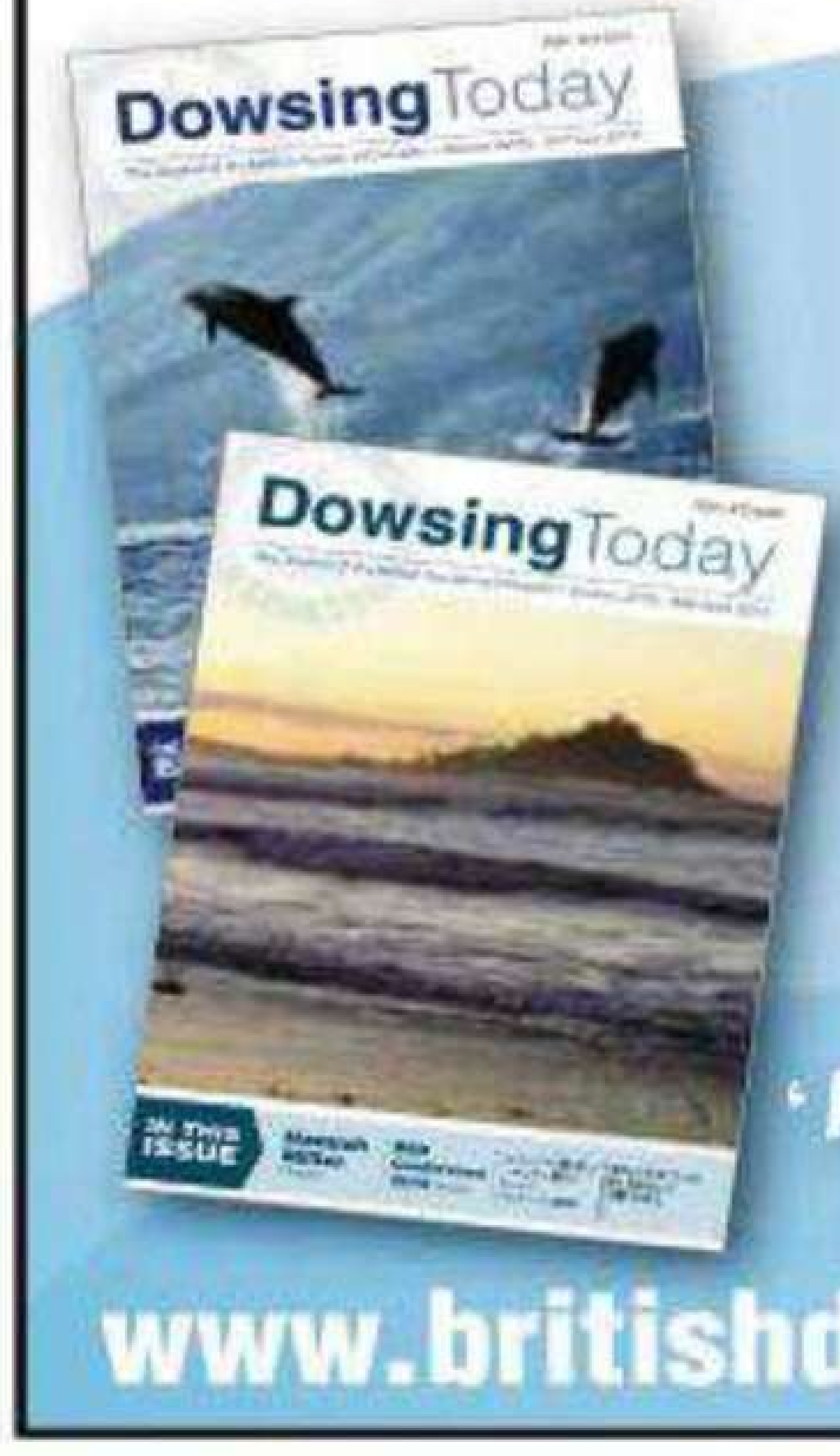

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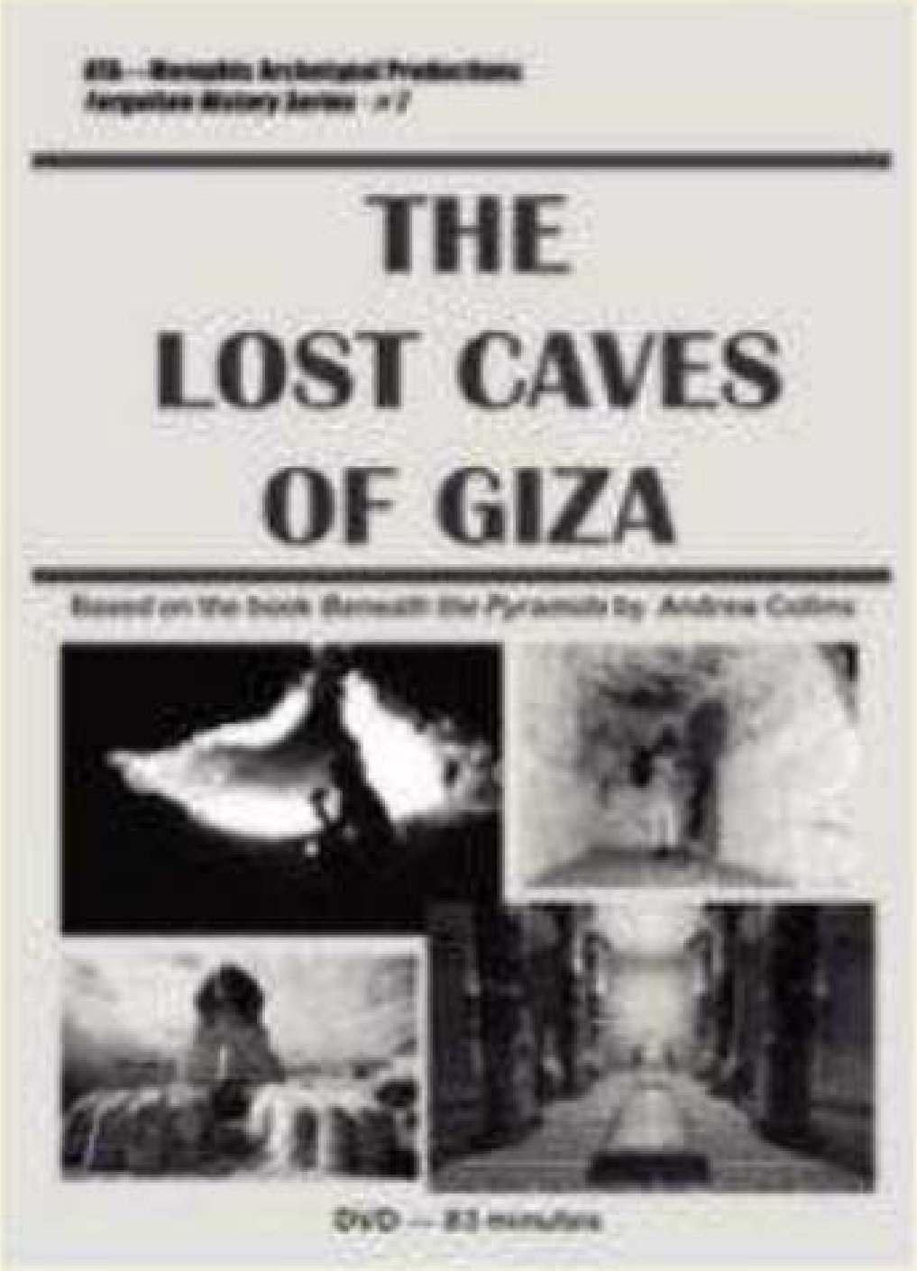

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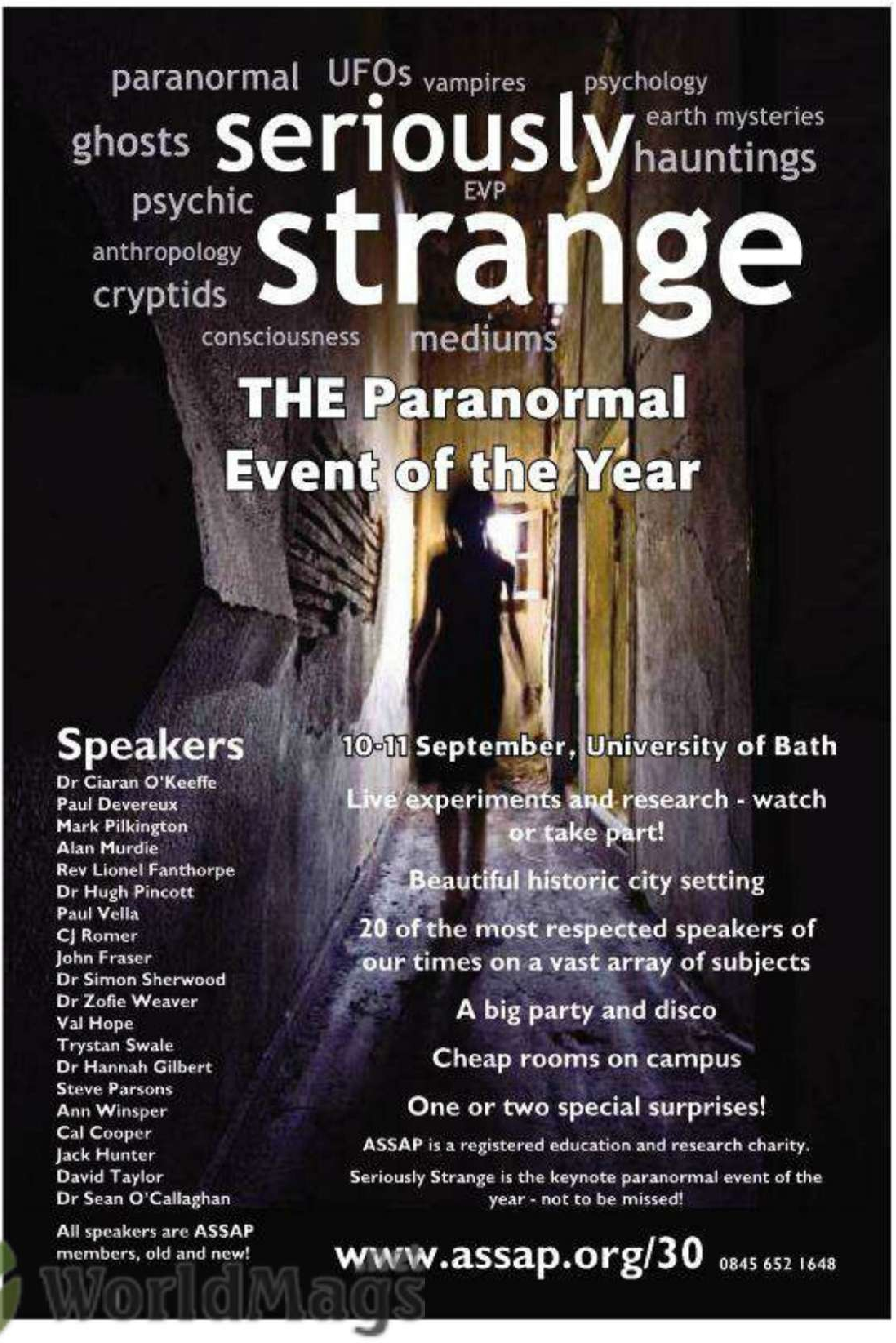

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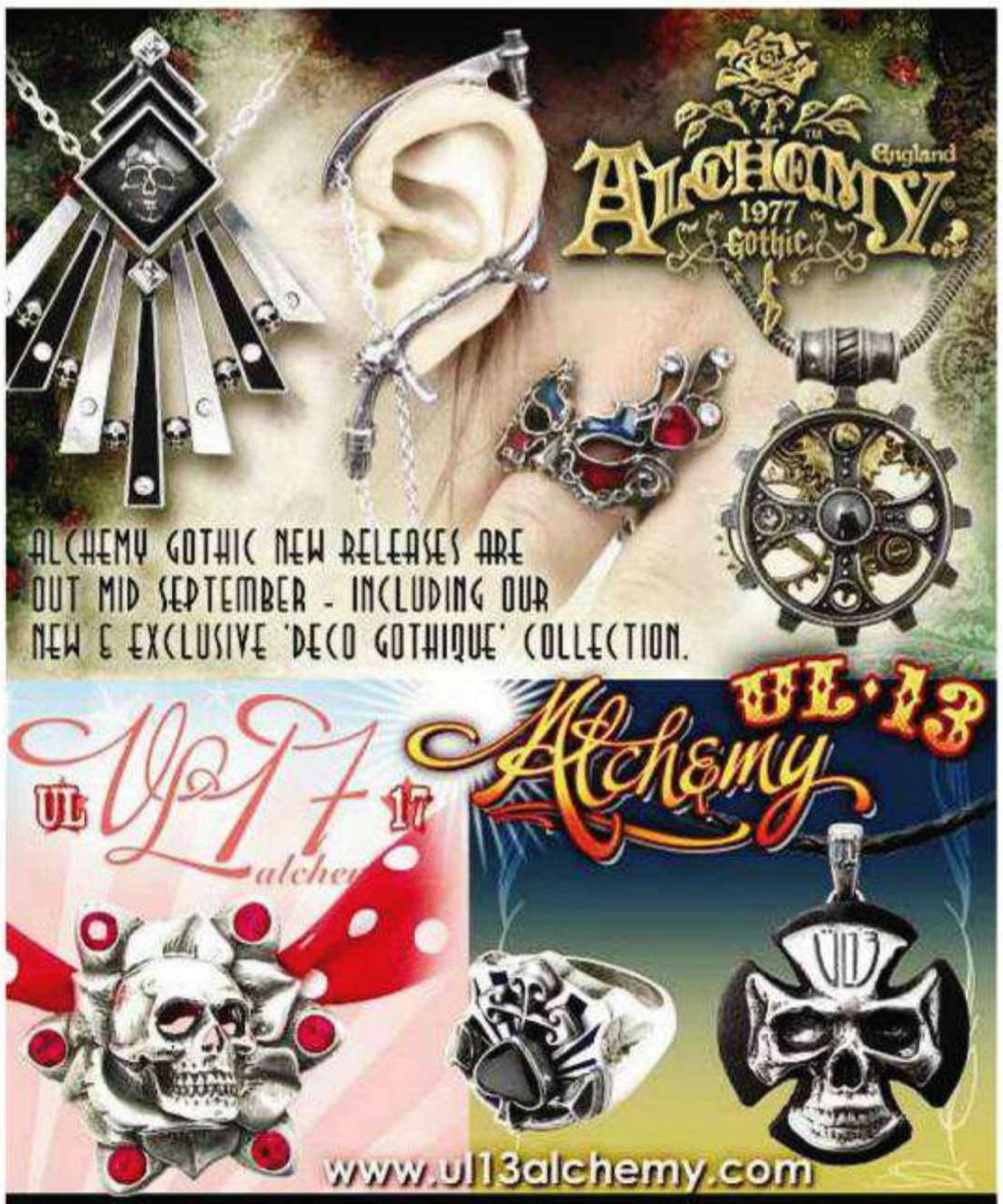

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Dear FT...

letters

Space visitor legends

With reference to the purported "space visitor" legends in various cultures [**FT270:34**], here is a quotation from a book written in 1885: "Nay, ye shall know the truth. We come from another world, though we are men such as ye; we come… from the biggest star that shines at night."

The source is H Rider Haggard's novel *King Solomon's Mines*, which describes the discovery of a lost civilisation in an (at that time) uncharted region of Africa. The words are spoken, not by a genuine extraterrestrial, but by the hero Allan Quatermain on his first encounter with the lost tribe: he has to conjure up an impressive-sounding alibi to prevent his team from being massacred on the spot. The fiction of "people from the stars" is maintained to the end of the book, and one can imagine that after the explorers' departure the suitably awed natives would pass the legend on for generations to come. Indeed, with the reference to "the biggest star" they would have their very own "Sirius mystery".

Generally, if a person (in this case Haggard) has a good idea, there's a fair chance someone else before them has had the same idea. It wouldn't surprise me if, over the millennia, travellers from one earthly civilisation to another have found it expedient to claim to come from another planet.

Andrew May
Crewkerne, Somerset

TV and the paranormal

Alan Murdie rightly complains of the dumbing-down effect of TV on serious research into the paranormal [**FT275:16**]. I watched one episode of *Most Haunted* and that was quite enough. The cheap spooky greenish lighting and exaggerated looks of fear from the participants at the slightest noise or movement weren't encouraging. The setting was an allegedly haunted brewery. At the end of half an hour all that had happened was a beer barrel falling over and rolling across the floor. This – after shots of it rolling were repeated several times, presumably in hope of making the incident look more substantial – was taken as evidence of a ghostly presence. The team then packed up their redundant detection equipment and marched off to their next encounter, no doubt equally terrifying.

The supernatural remains enigmatic. It may be based on nothing more than human hopes, fears and dreams; or it may afford glimpses of things that, if understood, could change our whole concept of reality. But in the present shallow and vacuous climate, expecting popular TV channels to study it in any depth is rather like expecting serious discussions of the possibility of extraterrestrial life from *Doctor Who*, or of the existence of God from *The Vicar of Dibley*.

MG Sherlock
Colwyn Bay, North Wales

An appeal

In June, I visited the Ram Inn in Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire, said to be "the most haunted house in England". Unfortunately, it is crumbling away since the owner, Mr Humphries, can't get funding to refurbish it. Is there a wealthy fortean able to help out or, perhaps, work on the building? Matters aren't helped when builders who attempt to work on the building leave after one day because of the strange phenomena they encounter. Mr Humphries is 84, so what will happen to the Ram when he goes is horrifying to contemplate. It will probably be demolished. The Bishop of Gloucester once visited it and said it was the most evil place he had ever encountered!

Paul R Thomas
Easton-in-Gordano,
North Somerset

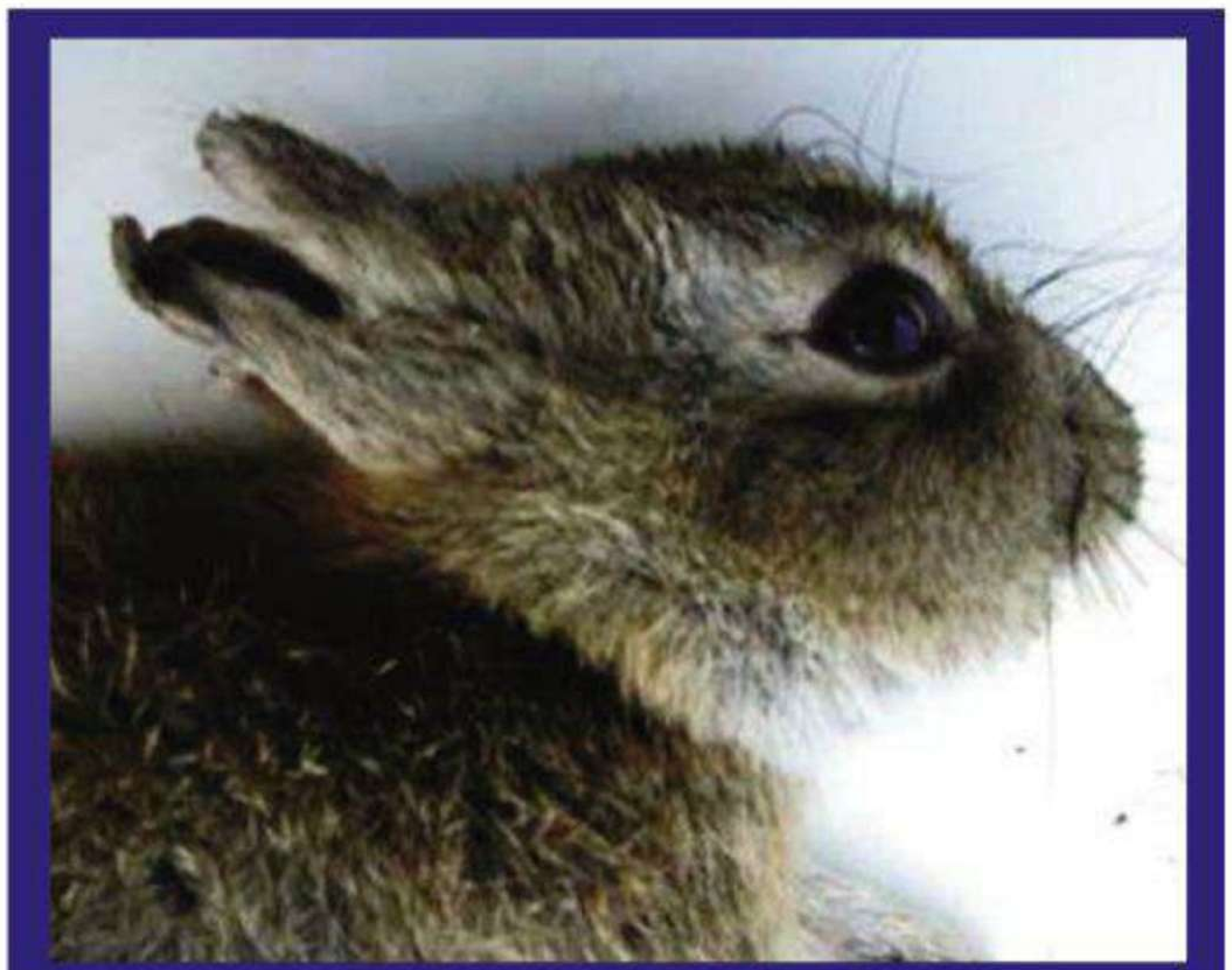
Bulging, staring eyes

Nine years ago, I was a member of the shift emergency response team working the night shift at a major chemical company. Security was very strict, so when the call came over the radio system that the gatekeeper was in distress we attended with some trepidation.

The site incident report written by the shift manager stated: "Approx 2230hrs 20/12/02 the shift had an emergency call from the gatehouse. 5 persons from the shift proceeded to the gate to find that the gatekeeper was in some distress. He reported that he had seen a face at the window staring at him. The description he gave was of a person with a white face and bulging, staring eyes. The shift personnel involved immediately searched the area and found no persons in the vicinity. The gatekeeper was advised to lie down in the first aid room as he had a temperature and was shaking. His company was informed and they sent a replacement and the said gatekeeper's family arrived to take him home. The gatehouse CCTV video was checked out and there did not appear to be anything out of the ordinary on it."

The gatekeeper had worked there for several years, but after this incident he never again returned to work.

Anon [name on file]
By email



Four-eared rabbit

I live on a farm near Walcha in New South Wales. On going out to check on our herd of goats on 1 July, I took a rifle along to shoot a rabbit or two for the dogs. I parked near an active warren and within a few minutes shot a rabbit. I waited a while to see if I could bag a second, but seeing that our cattle had wandered near to the road I picked up the bunny and got our working dog to help me round up the cattle. I was amazed to find that the rabbit had four ears – two facing forwards and two backwards.

Kit Dawson
Walcha, New South Wales

Scalp witness

The report "Handing back a yeti hand" [**FT277:17**] implied that, before the imminent delivery of replicas, the Pangboche Monastery in Nepal had no yeti hand or scalp due to thefts in the 1990s. However, when I visited the monastery in 2005, they had a yeti scalp (real or otherwise), which was being used to raise small donations. There was no sign of a yeti hand.

Paul "Tiny" Jackson
Wiltshire

The Trunko probability

Toby Venables states [**FT277:68**] that because AK Jones didn't observe or photograph the Trunko carcase when it was originally beached ashore at Margate, South Africa, in mid-November 1924 but only when it was rebeached there about a month later, my solving of the Trunko mystery – identifying the Trunko carcase from Jones's recently-rediscovered photos as having been a beached globster [**FT275:42**] – can only be said to be probably correct, not definitely so, as the rebeached carcase might actually have been a different one, especially as it was smaller than the original. Naturally, this possibility cannot be entirely discounted. However, it is one so remote as to be unworthy of serious consideration.

Apart from the smaller size of the December carcase, and its lack of the trunk and tail that were reported for the November one, the two are extremely similar: both were limbless, headless, shapeless, bloodless, covered in a very striking 'pelage' of snow-white hair, and highly decomposed. Bearing in mind that if any beached, decomposing carcase is subsequently washed back out to sea, chunks of it will definitely fall away and/or be ripped from it by marine scavengers or by predators such as whales or sharks, especially elongated well-delineated portions such as the trunk and tail (which would have had only a relatively small, fragile attachment site to the main mass), these differences between the two carcases are readily explained.

YOU'VE BEEN TRUNKOED!

No one had realised there were photos of Trunko

Far less plausible, conversely, is the prospect that two completely separate carcases sharing such unusual, distinctive characteristics as those noted above had washed ashore on the same coastline within a month of each other, particularly when (at least to my knowledge) no similar carcases had ever done so there before, or indeed since.

And even if, by some exceptionally unlikely fluke, two such carcases had genuinely done so, it doesn't make a great deal of difference to the likelihood of my identification of Trunko as a globster being correct. For many decades, globsters were a major cryptozoological mystery, but in the past few years they have been identified using DNA analyses of tissue samples. In every case, the globster has been shown to be an amorphous, limbless, headless, bloodless mass that constitutes a tough skin-sac of decomposed blubber containing collagen, whose exposed fibres yield the snowy 'fur' so frequently reported. Occasionally, an isolated bone or two with associated tissue have also remained within this mass, superficially resembling tentacles or other elongate organs.

As for the Trunko scenario of a beached globster subsequently being washed back out to sea and then being rebeached, this is hardly unique. As recently as June 2011, precisely the same series of events occurred with a globster washed ashore on Barbados; and in the autumn of 1808 it happened with the famous Stronsay 'sea serpent' – in reality the carcase of a very large basking shark. Of course, Mr Venables may well reiterate that we cannot be sure in either of these cases that it was the same carcase that was rebeached. However, to adopt this attitude is to multiply improbability by improbability, whereas I prefer to adhere to Occam's Razor.

I believe that my Trunko solution covers all of the facts. After all, the alternative is that lurking somewhere out there in the ocean depths off South Africa, unseen by the local inhabitants and still undiscovered by science, is a population of totally outlandish, white-furred, limbless creatures brandishing a lengthy tail for whipping whales with, as well as an elephantine trunk, yet lacking any recognisable head, thus constituting a species wholly unlike any other animal form either alive today or known from the palæontological record. And just how probable is that?

Dr Karl Shuker
Wednesbury, West Midlands

Smart dinosaurs

It occurred to me that there is little evidence to back the assertion, essentially unchallenged by palæontologists, that there were no prehistoric civilisations as advanced as modern man's. We have barely documented a fraction of the modern world's several million animal species, and only a couple of thousand (at most) from the prehistoric world. Who's to say that none of the literally millions of prehistoric species for which we have no fossil record achieved a high level of scientific advancement? I posit that not only did at least one species develop the ability to create complex tools, but that there were at one point dinosaur equivalents to our Mendeleev, GLONASS, the Internet, and so forth. Of course we haven't found remains of their great temples, cities, and machines – they all crumbled into dust, as will ours in a couple of thousand years, never mind a couple of million. What delicious irony it would be if 65 million years from now, scientists of another species, having simply not found any fossilised human remains, concluded that chimpanzees were the smartest primates of this epoch!

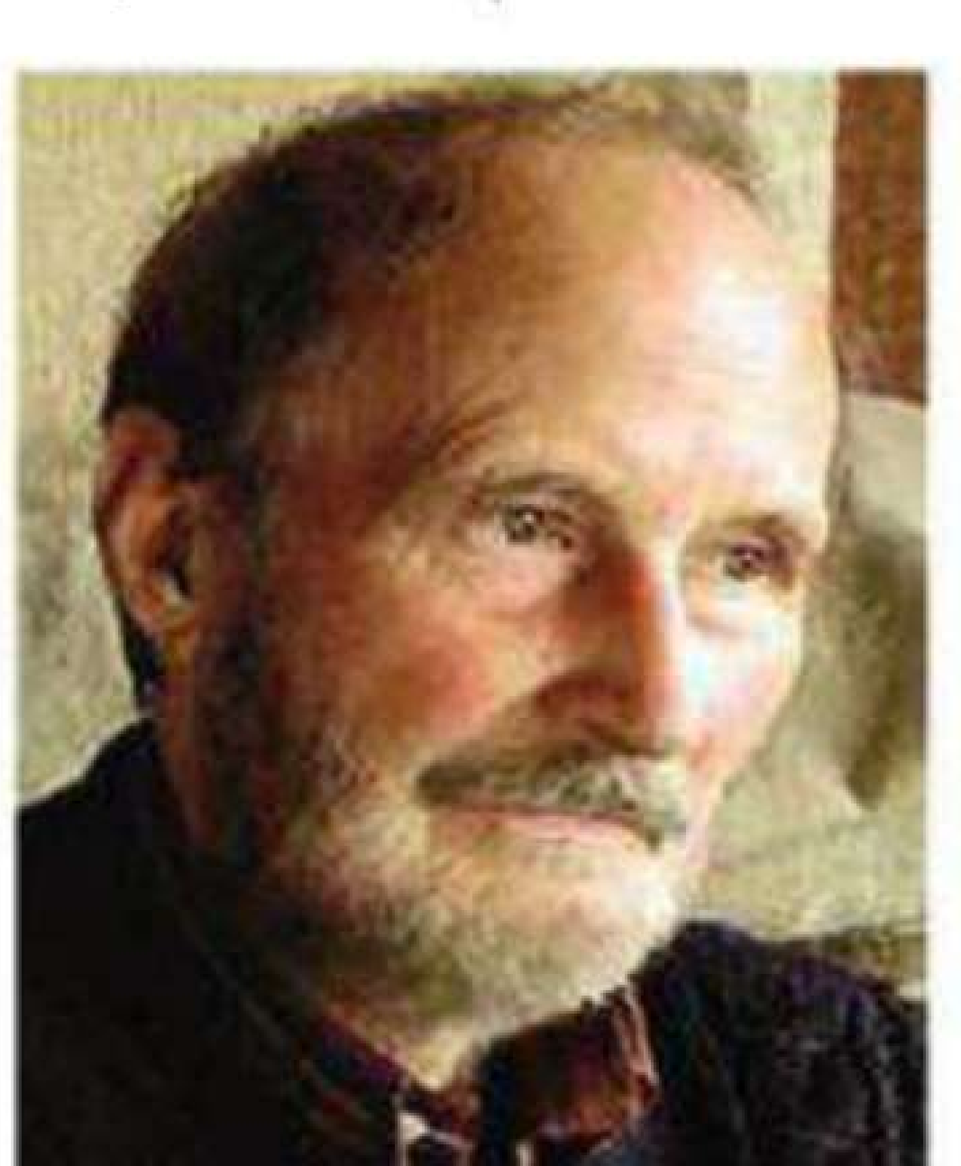
Noah Savage
By email

Stan Gooch

Re your tributes to Stan Gooch [**FT272:24, 38–47**]: I am aware that previous correspondents have (with good reason) poured cold water over many of his assertions about the origins of human culture. My own feeling, as someone who first came across his work from reading a letter he wrote to the late Anthony Burgess (proclaiming himself a "genius"), is that his writings propelled me into thinking deeply about the subject, even though I was at the same time dissatisfied with his Neanderthal/Cro-Magnon interbreeding theory. This dissatisfaction only increased after meeting him several times, shortly before he left London for Wales in the mid-1990s. He struck me as someone not open to debating other theories.

Of course, theories about the origins of human culture (at least, those that don't involve some sort of extraterrestrial intervention) are rather thin on the ground. Indeed, in mainstream science and academia the whole subject has been taboo for many years. Stan (below) had obviously gleaned many of his ideas from Sir James Frazer, Robert Briffault and Robert Graves (each of whom he acknowledges). These writers, like himself, wanted to look at the "big picture", but were luckily living at a time that was more able to tolerate such ambition, even while not encouraging it. By contrast, Stan was unable to fit at all easily into our contemporary compartmentalised way of regarding education and – by extension – life itself. The late Paul Goodman called it "Compulsory Mis-Education" followed by "Growing Up Absurd".

Stan, with his background as a Jungian psychologist, was looking to transcend this compartmentalisation and integrate our "divided self" – and I continue to think that his first two books, *Total Man* (1972) and *Personality and Evolution* (1973) are very valuable in their appreciation of our seemingly contradictory nature, our potentially destructive combination of what he termed "System A" (anti-trance/objective) and "System B" (trance/subjective) consciousness. This conflict or tension could, he believed, be transcended by "System C" consciousness. "System C" could not be defined in any great detail, but was related to art and humour (a precarious balance of opposing forces). As Stan come to these conclusions, there was no doubt he was indebted to Schiller's *Letters on*



the Aesthetic Education of Man, a fact that he openly admitted. Nevertheless, these two books remain essential reading for anyone wanting to recognise what being fully human means.

Unfortunately, with the publication of *The Neanderthal Question* (1977), I think that Stan took a wrong turning, though this was probably understandable. When I first read it (as well as his subsequent *Cities of Dreams*), I was intrigued but rather less than convinced. A few months later, I came across the evening class in Camden Town run by the anthropologist Chris Knight. I soon read Knight's book *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture* (1991) and was excited that (a) Stan was apparently not all alone in his ideas and (b) there was someone he could possibly work with. Unlike Stan, Chris Knight had a university post as an anthropology lecturer, and, somewhat amazingly, was able to organise international conferences on the subject of the origins of language and culture. Unfortunately, Stan refused to meet him to debate any of his work (he told me he was "in retreat"). Shortly after that, he left London for good. A few months after that, I came across a review of *The Neanderthal Question* by Jacquetta Hawkes (published in *The Sunday Times* 19 June 1977) and I feel that it gives a good summary of what she calls Stan's "aberration", while acknowledging the qualities of his earlier books.

Of course, there is some evidence (though it is not undisputed) that there was some interbreeding between Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon in parts of Europe around 30,000 or so years ago. However, there is evidence for the origins of human culture in southern Africa (in the form of red ochre mining, used for ritual purposes) which dates back more than 100,000 years and which is certainly not the work of Neanderthals. If Neanderthals had culture, it is likely that it was achieved in a similar way to *Homo sapiens* or otherwise from imitation of *H.sapiens*. The (possible) interbreeding did not create culture – why should it? So how did human beings acquire culture and language? I urge anyone interested in this question (which should be everyone!) to read Chris Knight's book and also go online to the following websites to find out more: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org and www.lunarchy.org

P.S. In all fairness, I should perhaps mention that the one person I have met who has psychic abilities is female, smaller than average, left-handed and with a small big toe – though I do not think this "proves" anything one way or the other…

Jason Wilcox
London

Voynich pictures

Has anyone else noticed that, almost in its entirety, the "illustrations" in the Voynich manuscript [**FT130:42–46, 260:58–59**] seem to have been laid out first and the text afterwards? It appears in most of the pages that the text is written around the images. Has this been a regular practice at some point in literary time? In most contemporary literature, text is the central element with illustrations accompanying it; but in the case of the manuscript the drawings appear to be the central element and the text somehow secondary. Maybe this shows us that it is after all a guidebook in the use of plants, the zodiac etc. in some context – medical, magical, or whatever. I expect some scholar has made this observation before and speculated on its significance; but I haven't come across anyone discussing it. Can anyone please point me in the right direction to such a discussion?

Sarah Louise
My email

Late Great Auks

In his note about the Great Auk [**FT277:17**], Karl Shuker remarks that the report about the possibility the birds survived in the British *Bird Notes and News* in 1929 "was undocumented until now in the crypto-literature".

It ought to be pointed out, however, that Rupert T Gould, in the second revised edition his book *Oddities* (Geoffrey Bles, 1944, pp127–128), in the course of discussing the submergence of Geirfuglaskeir off Iceland, where there was a large colony of Auks and the killing of the supposed last two Auks on Eldey in 1844 by Jón Brandsonsson and Siguror Islefsson, writes (albeit in a footnote) that: "In 1929 it was claimed that a bird, definitely identified as a Great Auk, had been observed swimming about under a wharf at one of the Lofoten Is., Norway. See *Bird Notes and News*, No. 7, vol. XIII (London, 1929)." That 1944 edition had no index. But in the index added to the US editions (University Books, 1965; Paperback Library, June 1969) the matter is clearly referenced. Having first read Gould's remarks way back in 1960, I always understood that the 1929 report was well known to those who concerned themselves with the extinction of the Great Auk.

I am sure that Karl is already familiar with Commander Gould's classic cryptozoological works, *The Case for the Sea Serpent* (1930) and *The Loch Ness Monsters and Others* (London, 1934). But both his *Oddities* and *Enigmas* (1929; 2nd ed. 1946), as well as *The Stargazer Talks* (1943), are also part of the fortean canon. Perhaps our notion of what constitutes "the crypto-literature" needs to be widened.

Peter Costello
Dublin

Editor's note: In 2001, *FT* correspondent Paul R Thomas drew attention to Gould's footnote about the 1929 Great Auk sighting [**FT148:55**].

Just spotlights?

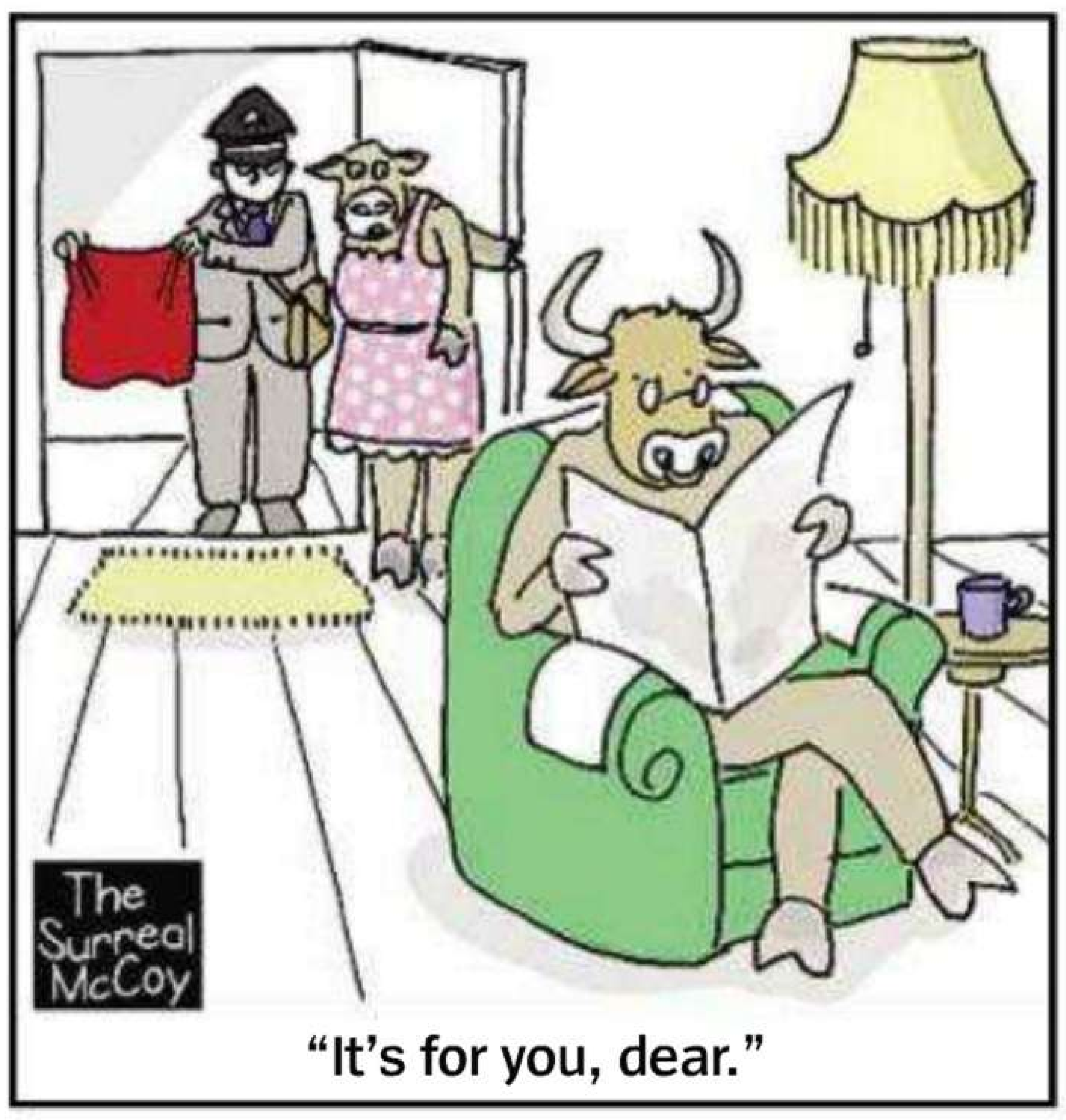
I believe I have observed several times myself the 'illuminated clouds' that Simon Cooke describes ["Lights over Coventry", **FT277:70**]. Particularly familiar is his mention of the lights moving, fusing and separating in a choreographed manner. I hate to burst a bubble, but I'm of a mind to believe that what he describes was most likely – as what I saw was – a pair of spotlights aimed skywards from one venue or another. After observing the 'phenomenon' here in Walthamstow, London, I asked around locally and later found that there had been a function at Alexandra Palace on the night in question. In retrospect, it seemed obvious that they'd been spotlights – shape, sweep, regularity, etc. It's far from glamorous – paling even in comparison to the usual 'atmospheric phenomenon' – but it is an explanation. Dr Cooke might want to check his local stadium's events next time he sees such lights.

Elliot Summerhayes
By email

Dark Star Day

On 11 May 2011, I was browsing the Internet Archive for public domain music to use in films I am working on. I came across the Grateful Dead page there and decided to have a listen. I found a concert from 1970 and chose to listen to their epic *Dark Star*. In the evening, I was in the bath and as usual reading a back issue of *Fortean Times*, this one from July 2004. There I found a review of the John Carpenter film *Dark Star* (1974). I didn't connect the two occurrences of 'Dark Star' until later that night when I was relaxing with a single malt and my iPad copy of the latest *Fortean Times*. There I found a review of the Carpenter film *Dark Star*, recently re-released on DVD [**FT275:61**]. Now, there may have been even more Dark Stars that I missed, but three in one day was enough to spark some kind of recognition of a pattern.

David Moss
By email



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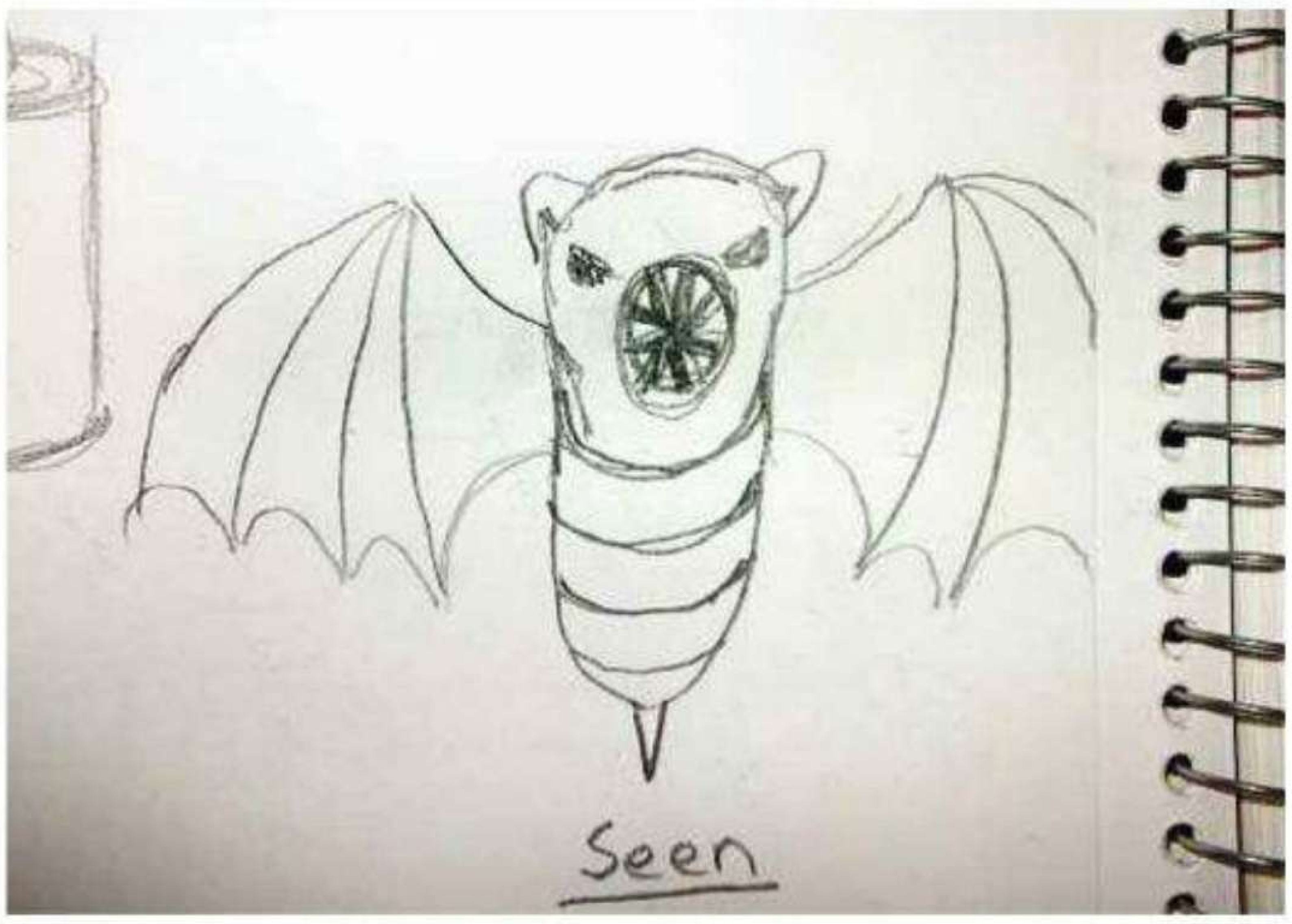
Bat-bee in Butte

I was standing outside on our porch in Butte, Montana, smoking a cigarette and looking into the sky above the front yard when I saw something that appeared to be a mixture of a bat and a bumblebee, though much larger than either. The only colour I could tell it had was black. It had a bat's face, but not a normal bat's mouth. Its black, beady eyes stared at me and gave me an impression of evil. Its ears looked almost like a wolf's, or maybe a cat's. It had the wings of a bat, maybe a bit larger to hold the weight of the creature. The mouth was the most peculiar part. It was a giant black "sucker", rather like an octopus sucker, lined with very sharp teeth, all the way around. Had it attacked me, I would not have liked to get my hand caught in there. The bottom of the creature was that of a bumblebee – stripes and a stinger. I'd say, judging from the distance it was from me, that it was between one and two feet from the top of the head to the bottom of the stinger. It really freaked me out. Above is a drawing I made of it.

Brock Beckman
By email



BROCK BECKMAN

Tiny woman

I'd like to share an experience similar to those told by Harman Dickson regarding so-called 'SEP' (Somebody Else's Problem) syndrome [**FT276:72**], a 'syndrome' that probably needs to be reconceived and renamed.

In the early summer of 1990, I went with five friends – Bob, Justin, Andy, Maggie, and Silvio – to the Six Flags theme park in Jackson, New Jersey. The day was warm, overcast, and humid, and the park was more than half empty. It was my first time there, so I let the others lead me around. It's a huge place, and for the first hour, we just walked around, looking at everything and buying some snacks.

Then, in one of the open public spaces, we saw a short middle-aged Hispanic man approaching with an exaggerated smile on his face. Over his head, he was holding a living, very petite, and almost perfectly-formed woman who was hardly taller than a standard Barbie doll; no more than 14in [36cm], and probably more like 11in [28cm]. The man was holding her with both hands by her waist, and she was smiling too. She kicked out her arms and legs and turned her head right and left, smiling at everyone, and was dressed in a dull pink body suit resembling something a ballerina might wear. People stopped and stared, pointing, mouths agape, as did my friends and I. We were no more than five feet [1.5m] from the pair.

To add to the strangeness of the experience, the woman moved her limbs and head oddly: slowly, but naturally and evenly, and in a manner I, for some reason, think of as 'bird-like', as if she were moving her limbs through water instead of air. There was absolutely no doubt that she was alive, and neither a park attraction nor some kind of a puppet a visitor had brought in. The woman smiled at us and blinked her eyes, seemingly fully appreciating our bewilderment. She had dark hair pulled back in a bun, and also looked as if she was Hispanic; she made slight, high noises with her mouth, but didn't speak or attempt to communicate with us verbally.

What struck me next was the psychology of my friends: after watching the woman for only a minute or so, they started to pull me away, as if they had seen enough. I was vocally adamant that what we were experiencing was incredible, and I watched as the man, who was sloppily dressed, walked away, calmly holding the woman aloft, until I could no longer see them. I wanted to talk about the experience far more than I wanted to take a ride on the roller coasters, but my friends were almost instantly silent about the matter. Silvio started singing Patsy Cline's "Walking After Midnight", and the others immediately joined in.

"The mouth was a black sucker lined with teeth"

Some two hours later, we stopped to have lunch at a concession, and once we were seated, I again brought up the tiny woman. To my surprise, none of the five would talk about her; each one of them either failed to acknowledge me or nervously turned to another and started talking about something else. When I pressed the matter, Bob said, "Oh – c'mon – it must have been a doll or something," and turned his head away.

On the long drive home in the crowded car, I received the same reaction – a sort of stony and indifferent silence – from all five of them, though they were eager to talk about the park itself. And I've received the same response from Bob, my closest friend by far among the five. To this day, if I raise the issue, he'll say "*What* are you talking about? I don't remember anything like that."

I cannot explain the tiny woman, and have thought about the experience many times over the years; obviously, we hear stories in the press all the time about "the world's shortest man/woman". In fact, there's one such story on the BBC's website today, about a 23½in (60cm) Filipino man. Why the woman I saw has never come to the attention of the world and the media, I cannot say. I only wish I had had a camera.

Joseph Barnes
New York

How did he know?

I would be interested to know if any readers have had experiences relating to mentally handicapped people having some sort of sixth sense. When my two children were very young, I would take them to visit my parents for a couple of hours every Saturday. My elder son would always sit with my father, but would have nothing to do with my mother. He has Down's Syndrome and has very limited speech skills, which can make it hard to understand what he is trying to say.

One Saturday 11 years ago, we made our customary visit. This time was to prove very perplexing. My elder son would only sit with my mother; he took hold of her hand and kept asking the same question: "Alright Nana?" My mother was amazed that he would not leave her side. After a couple of hours visiting my parents, my routine would be to take the boys to visit my cousin and his family. This day, my elder son refused to leave his grandmother's side. This was unheard of, as he loved nothing more than going on a journey. My parents asked me to let him stay with them while my younger son and I went about our Saturday routine. When I returned, my mother told me that my son had not let go of her hand at all. When it was time for us to return home my elder son was crying and continually said on the return journey, "No. Stay with Nana!"

In the early hours of Sunday morning, I received a phone call from my sister. My mother had been rushed into hospital with a suspected heart attack. She had indeed had a heart attack; in fact she had another four that day. She was 63 at the time, fit and active with no history of heart problems or any other health issues. The family believe my son sensed what was going to happen.

Mr Jody Willis
Weardale, County Durham

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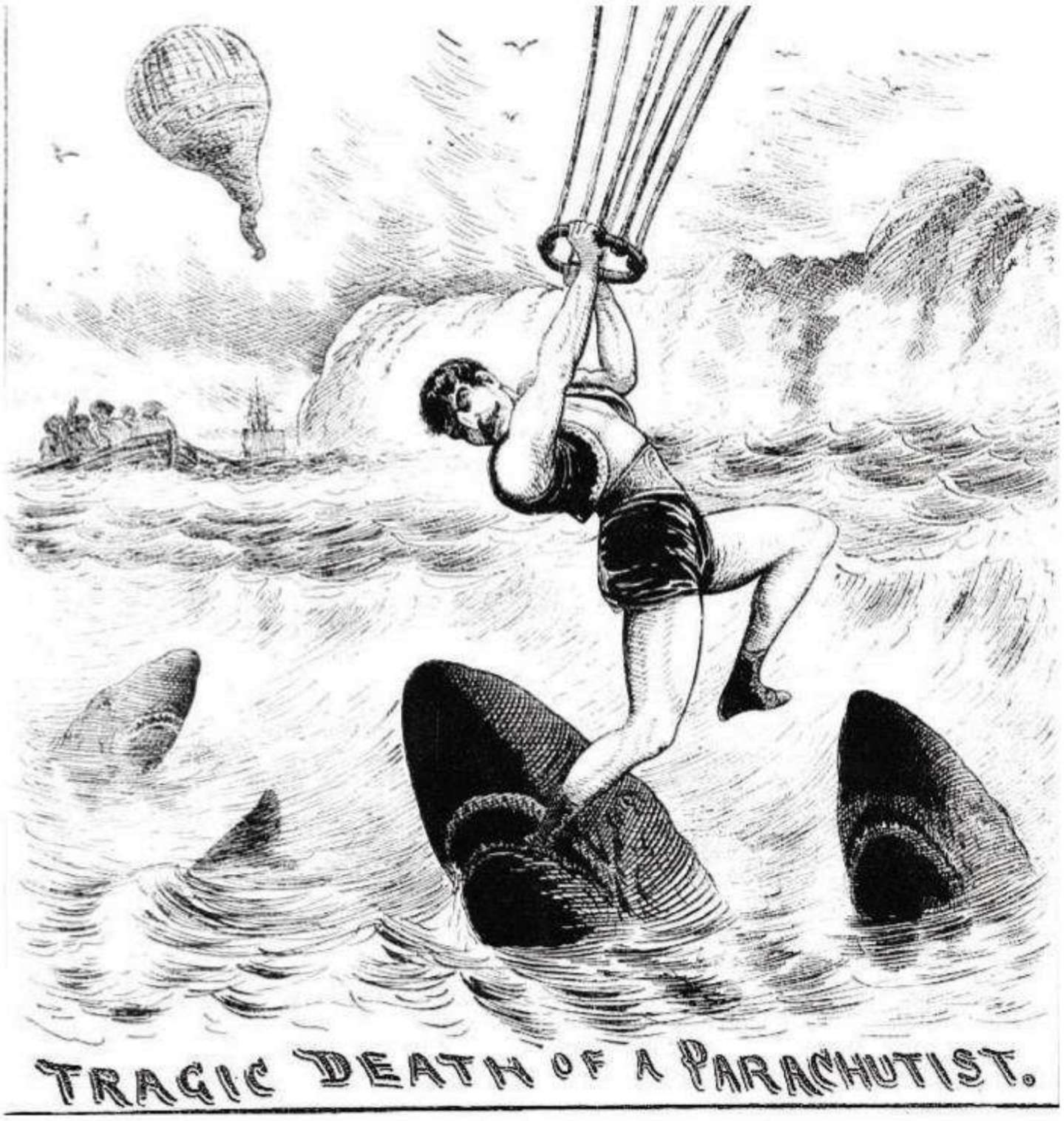
6. TRAGIC DEATH OF A PARACHUTIST

Just imagine the scene. Park van Tassel, the intrepid American aeronaut, makes an ascent from Honolulu in front of a cheering crowd. But ominously, the balloon is beginning to drift seaward. Unable to control the craft, van Tassel leaps from the balloon and opens his parachute, but as he slowly descends, there is something waiting for him down there… People trying to rescue van Tassel are appalled to see the sharks which grab the unfortunate aeronaut and tear him to pieces.

'Professor' Park van Tassel was a Albuquerque showman and bartender who took an interest in ballooning from 1879 onwards. He was more than a little accident-prone, often crash-landing and injuring himself. Sometimes, he was booed by the mob for 'chickening out' when his balloon refused to take to the air altogether. Once, a spectator was knocked out cold by the ballast the careless Professor threw from the balloon. Another time, van Tassel was himself beaten up by a friend of his after making an injudicious remark about the man's girlfriend, and put in hospital before a balloon ascent could even be contemplated. Plans for two San Fransisco youngsters to have a 'balloon marriage' in van Tassel's craft in 1884 had to be abandoned because no priest or justice of the peace could be persuaded to take a ride with the accident-prone aeronaut. In 1887, a Los Angeles ascent had to be stopped because of sabotage: "somebody had been monkeying with the pipe," as the Professor himself expressed it.


TRAGIC DEATH OF A PARACHUTIST.

ABOVE: The tragic death of a parachutist, from the *Illustrated Police News* of 14 December 1889.

There were several cabinet cards depicting the daredevil van Tassel: a sturdy, muscular man with a large handle-bar moustache. Some time in the 1880s, he married his wife Jeanette. A tall, handsome blonde, she was a daredevil just like her husband, making several successful balloon ascents. She was the first woman in the United States to perform a parachute jump. But as we have seen, it looked very much like Mrs van Tassel had become a widow in November 1889, when the *New York Times* reported that the Professor had been killed by sharks off Honolulu, under the singular circumstances outlined above. But fortunately for the aeronaut and his wife, it turned out that the news of his death had been very much exaggerated. There had actually been two men in the balloon, and although the Professor's helper Joe Lawrence had been eaten by the sharks, the indestructible van Tassel had successfully kept afloat and evaded the marauding sharks, to be rescued by a local boat crew. Most people would have remained on dry land for good after such a narrow escape, particularly since van Tassel had very nearly been killed earlier the same year, when his legs had become entangled in the balloon support lines after part of his parachute had opened.

But the American adventurer sought pastures new in the Antipodes, together with a troupe of performers showing off gymnastics, swordsmanship, and roller-skating. The main feature was that a scantily clad 'lady parachutist' leapt out from van Tassel's balloon, and performed gymnastics hanging from a trapeze bar suspended below her parachute, all the way down to earth. Park van Tassel had a daughter named Jenny who did parachute jumps from balloons, but the two young ladies accompanying him in Australia were the sisters Valerie and Gladys Freitas, both performing under the name of van Tassel. They appear to have been quite skilful performers, never coming to grief during a series of performances in 1890 and 1891. The 'lady parachutist' stunt was considered quite outrageous by the Australian clergy, particularly when performed on a Sunday, installing lecherous thoughts into the minds of impressionable youngsters.

In 1892, Park van Tassel went on to India, where he was joined by his daughter Jenny. At the time, the subcontinent was full of wealthy nabobs, many of whom had a fondness for the performances of female parachutists. But when performing in front of the Nawab of Dhaka in March 1892, poor Jenny crashed into a tree. She was severely injured and died a couple of days later. For her, there was no coming back from the dead.

Park van Tassel himself kept performing for many years. In September 1930, the 78-year-old daredevil was featured in the *New York Times*, the very same newspaper that had erroneously reported his demise 41 years earlier. Captain van Tassel, as he now styled himself, freely told the journalist about the ups and downs of his adventurous life: in Siam, he had crash-landed into a large mulberry tree, and in India, he had nearly been lynched by fanatics who feared he would bring malevolent devils of the air with him in his balloon. His experiences covered more than a century, van Tassel boasted, and he had jumped from balloons in almost every country in the world.

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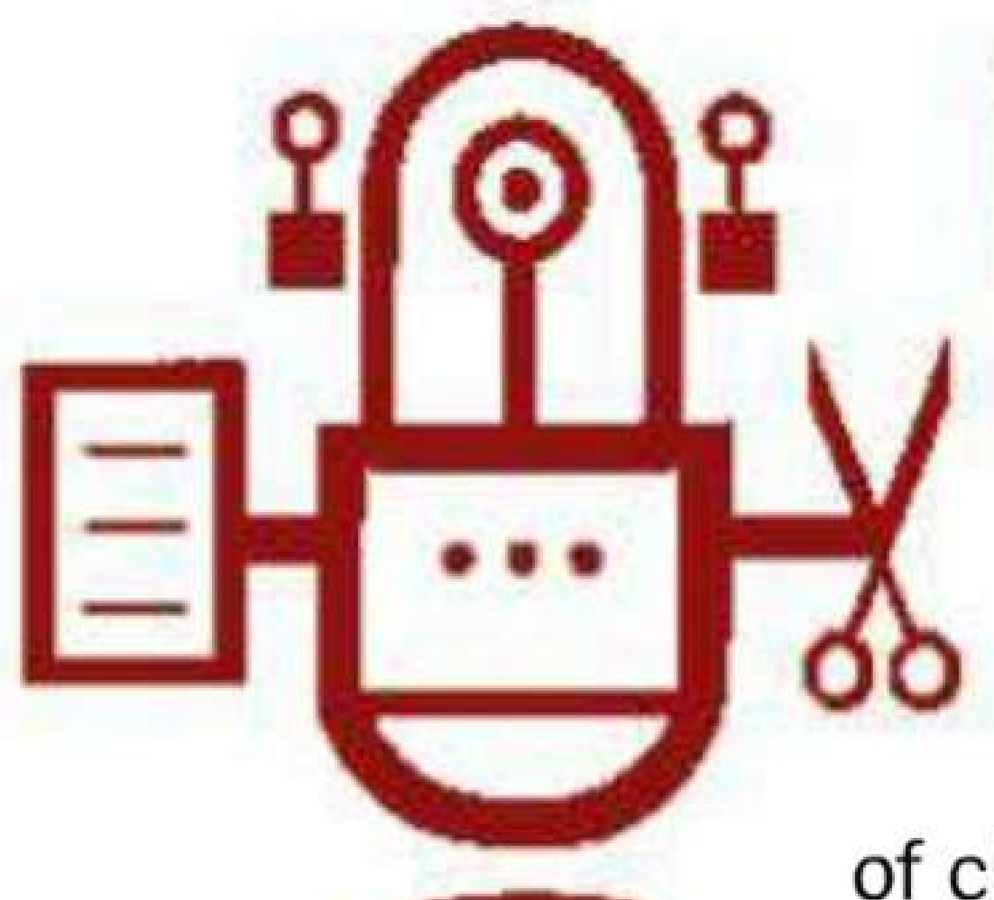

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 8 Aug 2011. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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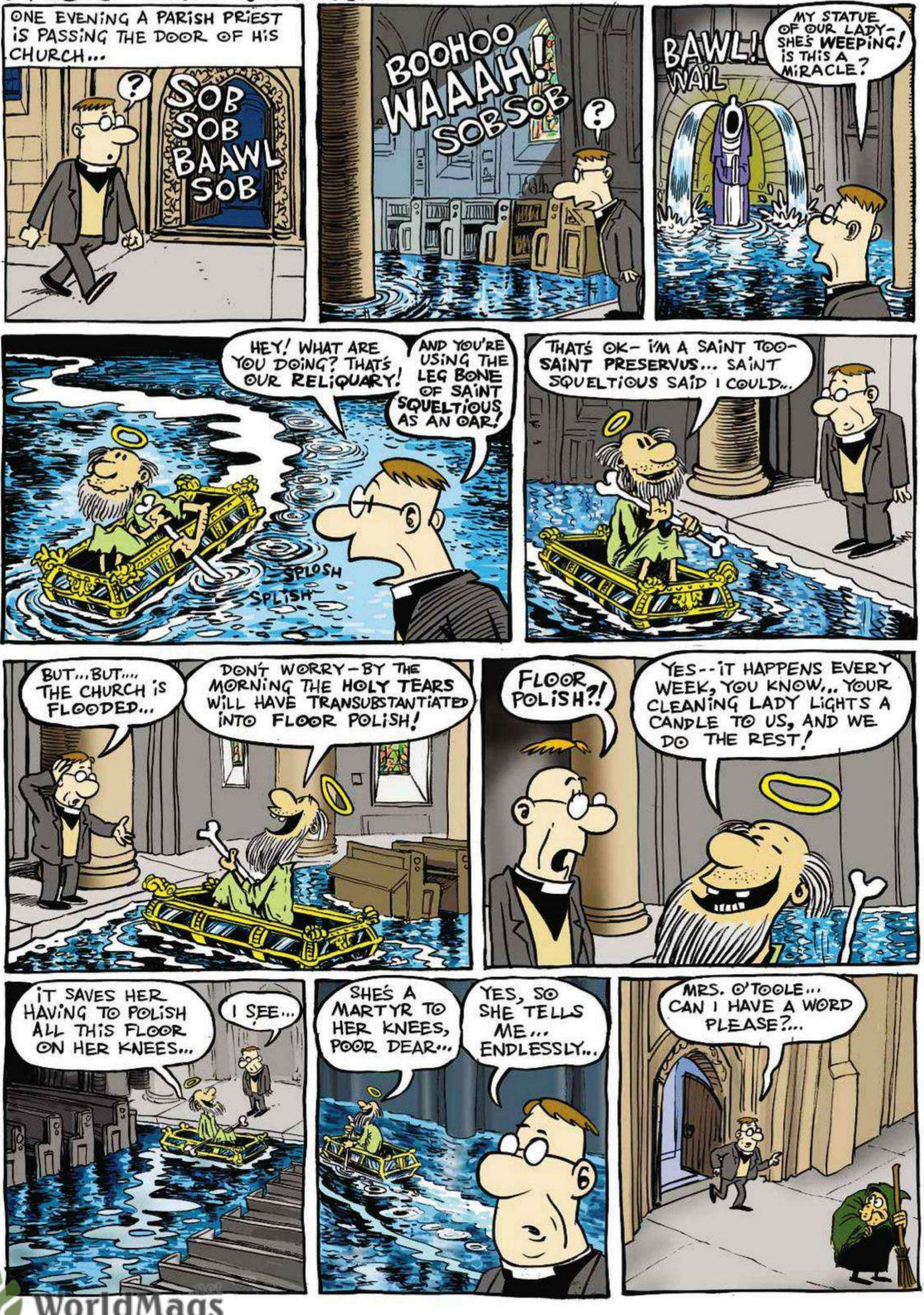
ONE EVENING A PARISH PRIEST IS PASSING THE DOOR OF HIS CHURCH...
?
SOB SOB BAAWL SOB
BOOHOO WAAAH! SOBSOB
?
BAWL! WAIL
MY STATUE OF OUR LADY- SHE'S WEEPING! IS THIS A MIRACLE?
HEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING? THAT'S OUR RELIQUARY!
AND YOU'RE USING THE LEG BONE OF SAINT SQUELTIOUS AS AN OAR!
SPLOSH
SPLISH
THAT'S OK- I'M A SAINT TOO- SAINT PRESERVUS... SAINT SQUELTIOUS SAID I COULD...
BUT...BUT.... THE CHURCH IS FLOODED...
DON'T WORRY-BY THE MORNING THE HOLY TEARS WILL HAVE TRANSUBSTANTIATED INTO FLOOR POLISH!
FLOOR POLISH?!
YES--IT HAPPENS EVERY WEEK, YOU KNOW... YOUR CLEANING LADY LIGHTS A CANDLE TO US, AND WE DO THE REST!
IT SAVES HER HAVING TO POLISH ALL THIS FLOOR ON HER KNEES...
I SEE...
SHE'S A MARTYR TO HER KNEES, POOR DEAR...
YES, SO SHE TELLS ME... ENDLESSLY...
MRS. O'TOOLE... CAN I HAVE A WORD PLEASE?...

COMING NEXT MONTH

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CLAIMANTS AND CONTROVERSIES OVER WHO WROTE SHAKESPEARE

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FORTEAN TIMES 280

ON SALE 15 SEPT

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

SEPTEMBER 1981

Rosa Quattrini had a rocky relationship with the authorities in Lombardy, Italy. After her 1964 vision of the Virgin Mary, a pear tree bloomed unexpectedly in her San Damiano garden and was declared a miracle. 'Mama Rosa' and her family were quick to exploit the millions of adoring pilgrims willing to 'donate' in return for an audience with the visionary and a glimpse of her miraculous tree. Ten years later, the family owned land, property and pilgrim hotels worth many millions, despite the Bishop of Piacenza's proclamation forbidding worship there or belief in her vision. In 1979, assets worth £12 million were seized by the Public Prosecutor after the Church accused the family of massive fraud. The pilgrims kept on coming and gratefully paying. When she died this month, Mama Rosa left her personal estate – estimated at over £2.5 million – to the Pope. To claim the fortune, the Pope was challenged to retract the accusation of fraud, rescind the Bishop's proclamation and declare her vision authentic. **FT33:34**, **36:20**

SEPTEMBER 1991

On the 9th, the *Today* newspaper shook the faith of crop-circle fans worldwide. In it, two aging artists from Southampton – Doug Bower and Dave Chorley – confessed to making many of the 'agriglyphs' that fans thought were messages from aliens, fairies or the Earth goddess. At first, Doug and Dave were blamed for *all* the landscape art discovered over several years – which they never claimed themselves. They told *Today* that, besides their rope-and-board trampling devices, they carried equipment for recording birdsong as cover should they be challenged. When they began in 1979, they said, they had the fields to themselves, industriously making their distinctive 'circles and bar' designs. As the phenomenon grew, it attracted the attention of increasing numbers of police, patrolling farmers, dedicated researchers and fans. Inevitably, they were spotted and had to use their excuse… so they decided to call it a day. Ralph Noyes, at the Centre for Crop Circle studies, told *FT* that he even had a call from a sobbing woman in the USA, begging to be told this revelation was not true. The phenomenon survived, of course, as a new generation of young 'makers' outdid each other with increasingly complex and often quite pleasing designs. **FT60:9–10**

Also this month, the mysterious electrical problems of Iverson Cottage reached national papers. Frank Pattemore's family moved into their stonewalled terrace home in Somerton, Somerset, in 1976. Since 1982, constant power surges blew fuses, light bulbs and most electrical appliances. When Frank began disputing the bills for unused power, the South Western Electricity Board (SWEB) investigated, but couldn't explain why the supply surged as high as 2,000 volts. SWEB reckoned they had spent £50,000 on investigations, rewiring the cottage four times, but the mystery remained. The Pattemores had to use oil lamps, candles, and gas heaters, and take baths and meals at a nearby relative's. "We are camping in our own home," said Frank. As further investigations failed – one recorded a surge of 12,000 volts when every device and switch was turned off – the Pattemores were accused of fraud. Frank's son Nigel was arrested at work, accused of hoaxing and "criminal damage", but charges were later dropped. Frank, a Burma war veteran and ex-policeman, was disgusted, so he wrote to Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher. Government officers came and went and then also dropped the matter. As far as we know, it remained unresolved. Mr Pattemore died on 6 August 2004, aged 95, but not before his home had become famous as 'Haywire House' and even received a visit from NASA scientists. **FT60:5–6**; see also **FT171:48–53**

SEPTEMBER 2001

On the 11th, of course, *al-Qaeda* terrorists struck a terrible blow to America's sense of security and supremacy, leaving nearly 3,000 dead in the attack on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon, including the deaths of rescuers and people on the hijacked planes. In its November 2001 issue, *FT* managed to fill four pages of the strangeness this tragedy engendered; something we have done well in the past (e.g. re. the omens concerning the first Gulf War, **FT57:6–9**). In this case, the signs and wonders included demonic faces grimacing from the billowing black smoke; numerological oddities relating to the date; premonitions; and curious prefigurings in the graphic designs of movies, CD covers and even folded bank notes. We even speculated on how the prophetic quatrains of Nostradamus could be manipulated. Although we missed the infamous 'tourist guy' (Google it) photo, that was just as well, as it was faked. **FT152:6–9**

Write Your Way To A New Career!

Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-two Years of Helping New Writers

by Nick Daws

When distance-learning pioneer Ernest Metcalfe founded The Writers Bureau in the late 1980s, he can hardly have dared hope that twenty-two years on it would be acknowledged as Britain's leading writing school. Yet so it proved, with thousands of Writers Bureau students seeing their work in print for the first time. And, for many of those who persevered with their writing, the dream of becoming a successful writer has turned into reality.

Students such as Tim Skelton. An engineer by profession, he had always harboured an ambition to write, and at the age of 40 signed up with The Writers Bureau. The decision changed his life: "My writing career took off exponentially. In 2005 I started appearing regularly in lifestyle and in-flight magazines. The following year I was commissioned by Bradt Travel Guides to write a guidebook to Luxembourg. I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated guidebooks for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA."

> *"My writing career took off exponentially."*

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2008. She also has her own website at www.hazelmchaffie.com.

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

Hazel McHaffie

Tim Skelton

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"Completing The Writers Bureau course has made it possible for me to attain my life-long ambition of becoming a published writer. The level of success I have achieved has far outweighed what I was hoping for when beginning the course. By the end of this year I should have eight books already published and hopefully two more finished."

Cindy-Lou Dale, Kent
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